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COMMONWEAL

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THE EURO COMES TO EUROPE

Jorge Pedraza

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To the Editors

Ladies in red?

Your comment [March 27] that "the College of Cardinals still has no coeds" triggered these reflections:

- After African Bishop Ernest Combo publicly suggested that women might some day be named "lay cardinals," Pope John Paul II reportedly observed that "Bishop Combo's proposal was not so far-fetched as to be unbelievable."
- The last unordained cardinal was Giacomo Cardinal Antonelli (1806-1876), secretary of state to Pius IX. In 1489 Giovanni de Medici (the future Leo X) was made a cardinal at the age of thirteen. The cardinalate is not an evangelical category; the church can make of it whatever she wishes—and she has.
- The requirement (since John XXIII) that every cardinal be a bishop need not be a hindrance; the same church that makes the rule can make the exception, as occurred, for instance, with deLubac in 1983 and Pavan in 1985.
- It isn't likely that we will ever see an apostolic letter claiming that the church does not consider herself authorized to confer the cardinalate on women. Is it unreasonable to wish that some day there might be women to represent over half of humankind in the pope's council—even to help elect the pope of all?

I am aware, however, of what has been proposed as the Conservative Manifesto: "Nothing must ever be done for the first time."

LARRY N. LORENZONI, S.D.B.
San Francisco, Calif.

Our history isn't that dark

Chris Appy has written a review that reveals more about himself than about the book he reviewed. Perhaps Paul Johnson's *A History of the American People* is flawed, but I can't be sure, because what is most obvious in the review is Appy's desire to see public admissions of guilt and apologies—for the A-bomb, slavery, capitalism, the treatment of Native Americans and women, etc. Teachers and writers who view American history as simply a series of cruelties and tragedies, victims and villains, miss the central fact about America. The vast majority of our people came here, and are still coming here, because they see America the dream. Most people who live here know there is no other country like America for freedom and opportunity.

In the twenty years I've lived in Houston, I've seen the Houston school district go from majority white to majority Hispanic, and the neighboring school district go from majority white to a nearly equal split among whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. I've seen a new "Chinatown" develop. I've worked with, my sons have played sports with, or had for neighbors people from Europe, the Middle East, the Far East, India, Mexico, and Central and South America. Immigrants come here because this is the land of opportunity. The dream to make a good life for oneself and one's family is a lure to all, from those with manual laboring skills to those with technical, professional, and entrepreneurial skills.

When I talked recently with my coworker, a Vietnamese, about President Bill Clinton's troubles, he pointed out how in this country we can laugh about our president. No one "disappears," no one's family is punished. He has made me realize how often we take our freedom of speech for granted.

There were mistakes and tragedies in American history, but books that focus on these negative victim/villain images are doing us and our children a disservice. This emphasis does not recognize the sacrifices of earlier generations to make America a better place, or the great men who gave us the best political system in the world. It does not inspire self-sacrifice or foster greatness but only creates resentments and division. We deserve better. If the worst aspect of Paul Johnson's book is that he celebrates the greatness of America, that is surely not something to be ashamed of!

CHRISTINE GRIFFITH
Houston, Tex.

The reviewer replies:

Thanks to Christine Griffith for taking the time to criticize my review. I do not believe that U.S. history is "simply a series of cruelties and tragedies." My chief objection to Paul Johnson's book is that it claims to honor the American "passion for justice" without examining any injustices or the efforts of so many diverse and anonymous people to right them. I agree that history should teach us about "the sacrifices of earlier generations to make America a better place," but we don't learn much about these from a man who makes the Great Depression seem like a market correction. Nor does Johnson teach us anything about the history of Griffith's African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern neighbors. My interpretation of the past may be more "negative" than hers, but perhaps she would agree that *any* "history of the American people," whether critical or celebratory, is shameful if it excludes the vast majority of Americans.

CHRIS APPY

Simplified Catholicism?

Commenting on a homily by Cardinal Francis George in which he described "liberal" Catholicism as an exhausted critique and a parasite on something that no longer exists, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels responds that Catholicism is big enough for a diversity of views, and that liberal Catholicism has made a major contribution to the contemporary church [Notebook, April 10]. Well said. But an even deeper critique is needed.

Cardinal George says that his own ideal, "simply Catholicism," is "able to distinguish between what fits into the tradition" and "what is a false start or distorting thesis." A liberal Catholic response might be: Precisely what is the tradition? Teachings are not static; they

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COMMONWEAL

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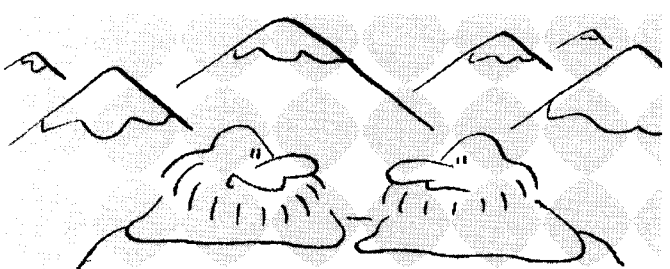

"Do you ever get the feeling that true inner peace is more trouble than it's worth?"

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have changed and evolved. In the first decades of Christianity, Paul had to correct Peter so that the gospel might be brought to Gentiles as well as Jews (Gal. 2:1-20). The church has changed its teachings on usury, slavery, marriage, and freedom of conscience—to name but a few. *Casti connubii* (Pius XI, 1930) and *Humanae vitae* (Paul VI, 1968) in our own time present dramatically different teachings on marital sexuality and responsible parenthood.

These changes reflect the critical thinking of Catholics through the ages. While liberal Catholics claim no monopoly on critical thinking, they see it as a core element in addressing the social and theological issues that occupy us in a particular time and place. Writing on "Development of Moral Doctrine" in *Theological Studies* in 1993, John Noonan made the case for evolving theological thinking: "All will be judged by the demands of the day in which they live....In new conditions, with new insight, an old rule need not be preserved in order to honor a past discipline."

Liberal Catholicism today rises organically from the teachings of Vatican II, which recognized the church as the "people of god" in whom unerring belief rests. The council blessed religious freedom, primacy of conscience, ecumenical dialogue, social justice, and political democracy—actions that continue to inspire liberal Catholics today, giving them hope for an open reexamination of many issues. It sustains those who articulate a "faithful dissent" on such questions as contraception, married clergy, the ordination of women, and divorce and remarriage.

In all of this, liberal Catholics experience no contradiction between their views and Cardinal George's ideal of a life-giving, joyful faith which unites us with the church of the past. They refuse to cede the church to those who understand critique as a form of disloyalty. To do so would destroy the very life, joy, and connection to the past that Cardinal George values.

Yes, change is a messy process, but what better evangelism is there today than the believer who thinks?

WILLIAM V. D'ANTONIO
Washington, D.C.
DANA GREENE
Alexandria, Va.

Black is not white

Like Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, I was present when Cardinal Francis George pronounced the death of "liberal Catholicism" as an "exhausted project" and predicted that the future of the church lies in "simply Catholicism." I too look forward to hearing some clarification of this provocative thesis from Cardinal George. In the immediate absence of a reply from him, let me hazard a response in his stead.

To say that "simply Catholicism" is the future of the church is to say once again that the faith is a matter of truth, not simply a matter of opinion. Put another way, "simply Catholicism" is the idea that there are such things as orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and that Scripture and tradition enable us to distinguish between them. Thus, in George's words, "simply Catholicism" is "a church which knows her Lord and knows her own identity, a church able to distinguish between what fits into the tradition that unites her to Christ and what is a false start or a distorting thesis."

"Simply Catholicism" is not, however, simply static. The faith has surely evolved over time, but this process of development takes place according to a principle of noncontradiction. The First Council of Constantinople surely marked a development in Christian doctrine, a change from the teaching of the First Council of Nicea. But Constantinople did not contradict Nicea; neither did Ephesus, Chalcedon, Florence, Trent, or Vatican II. This inerrancy is of course the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is in this vein that George concludes that the church "here and now" is "always one with the church throughout the ages and with the saints in heaven."

As Steinfels wrote, there is diversity within the church, and, indeed, "it is hard to imagine a Catholic church without some degree of diversity and pluriformity." Still, it cannot be this diversity and pluriformity that make the one out of many. The unity of the church is the unity of faith, of many believers sharing the same beliefs. The church cannot be a democracy of thought because all thoughts do not equally reflect the truth.

To cite examples (not employed by the cardinal), Hans Küng's theory that Jesus showed the way to salvation but only as a human ambassador for the divine, not as God himself, is an opinion which all faithful Catholics must reject; it cannot be squared with the true apostolic teaching that Jesus was truly God and truly man. Again, Frances Kissling's opinion that abortion can be a morally licit, even laudable act consistent with the teaching of the gospel cannot command religious assent. It does not "fit into the tradition" that unites the people of God to Christ; it is contrary both to Scripture and to the constant teaching of the church. A group whose diverse members believe such diverse things (that Jesus was divine and that he was only human; that abortion is gravely sinful and wholly acceptable) is not a community of believers.

But what criteria determine the content of "simply Catholicism," distinguishing revealed truth from heretical opinion? Surely the dogmas defined by the councils and the infallible teachings of Peter's successors; but what beyond this? Steinfels's comments quite properly raised that question, to which it is hoped that Cardinal George will provide some answer. For her part, Steinfels might further the conversation by explaining more fully what she means by "liberal Catholicism." Having contended that liberal Catholicism proposed new understandings of the human person and human freedom, conscience, church and state relations, she might wish to clarify the relationship between these constituents of liberal Catholicism and the truth of the faith.

JOHN M. BREEN
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Keeping security social

In his State of the Union address last January, President Bill Clinton opened a national discussion about how to "Save Social Security." Clinton proposed that any federal budget surplus (now estimated at $75 billion or more) be dedicated to shoring up the anticipated shortfall in Social Security revenues in the coming century. At present, Social Security runs a $100 billion annual surplus, money the federal government does not actually hold in trust but uses to balance its own annual budget. It is the Social Security taxes (FICA) of current workers that pay for the benefits of retirees.

And therein lies the problem. By 2013, as the baby-boomer generation begins to retire in large numbers, the system will start to pay out more than it takes in annually. By 2029 the Social Security surpluses now being generated and credited to the system by the government will no longer exist. Although most Americans think of Social Security as a kind of individual retirement plan administered by the federal government—politically, that was how FDR sold the program—it is better described as a social convenant between generations. That's why numbers count. In 1960 the payroll taxes of five workers paid for every Social Security beneficiary. Currently three workers support each retiree, and by 2029 there will be only two workers paying into the system for each beneficiary. It is because of such demographics that payroll taxes have risen from 2 percent in the 1930s to the current 12.4 percent (split between employees and employers). By 2029 (assuming no other fix is found) payroll taxes will have to be raised, or benefits cut significantly, or the system will go bankrupt.

Clinton's budget-surplus proposal was shrewd as well as responsible politics. Congressional Republicans are torn over the federal budget surplus. Fiscal hawks want to continue to shrink government and cut taxes. Republican moderates are leery of further cuts in taxes or government programs, especially popular middle-class entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare.

Still smarting from the political debacle surrounding his health-care initiative, Clinton has been careful not to put forward a specific Social Security proposal of his own. Many Republicans, in a move designed to appeal to anti-Washington sentiment as well as to the investment community, have championed the "privatization" of all or part of the Social Security system. If Social Security is just a retirement plan, why use government as the middle man? Why not let taxpayers open individual investment accounts with the wages that now go into payroll taxes? Investing payroll taxes in the stock market would stimulate the economy and, so the theory goes, pay higher yields for workers to retire on.

Initially resistant to such ideas, some Democrats, most notably Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (NY), have put forward partial privatization plans as well. Moynihan's own plan calls for a 2 percent cut in payroll taxes that workers are advised but not required to put into tax-free individual investment accounts. Moynihan would also cut the rate of cost-of-living adjustments and raise the retirement age of beneficiaries. (The private bipartisan National Commission on Retirement Policy has put forward a similar plan.) This partial privatization scheme, Moynihan candidly admits, is intended to forestall the Republicans' more radical

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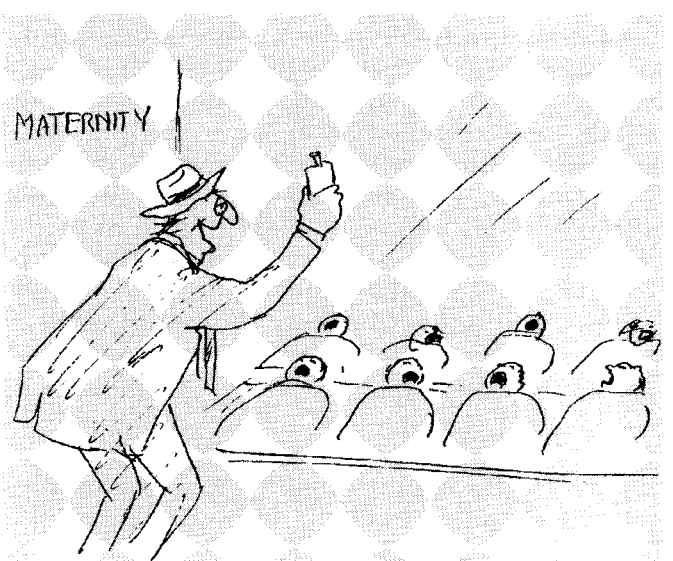
privatization proposals. Moynihan says he now regrets that principled opposition to compromise on welfare reform only resulted in the abolition of the welfare entitlement altogether.

Moynihan's worries cannot be lightly dismissed and his proposal deserves serious consideration. Although Social Security is still enormously popular with voters, support is waning—especially among younger workers, most of whom will pay more in payroll taxes than they will receive in benefits. Even more worrisome, the regressive nature of the tax—90 percent of the work force pays more in payroll taxes than in income tax—has perversely fed the broader anti-tax and anti-government mood of the last two decades. Indeed, in lowering income tax rates and increasing the payroll tax, the Reagan "revolution" managed both to redistribute wealth upward and increase the average citizen's resentment toward government. Now some Republicans hope to use the "no new taxes" mantra to dismantle a program that is a paradigm of how government can provide for the common good.

Turning from government to the stock market to guarantee a basic economic provision for the elderly is wrong for two reasons. First, the stock market can fail (yes, even *this* market) in a way government cannot. Second, the social and moral return from our shared commitment to Social Security far outweighs any failure to maximize return on retirement funds. In these flush times it must not be forgotten that Social Security has been this nation's single most successful antipoverty program. Thanks to Social Security, dire poverty among the elderly, once epidemic, has virtually been eliminated. This has been accomplished not because of a high rate of return on investment, but because the system is mandatory and has a redistributive mechanism. Poorer retirees get back a higher percentage of their contributions than do more affluent retirees. Despite popular misconceptions, Social Security is not primarily an investment program but a social insurance system designed to guarantee a minimum standard of decency for all. Indeed, one-third of Social Security outlays go to widows, widowers, the disabled, and children who have lost a parent. Just as important, Social Security still provides the bulk of retirement income for two-thirds of Americans.



"C'mon, everybody! Cheers!"

Yes, keeping the system solvent will demand some restructuring. But reform should be guided by a conception of Social Security that places mutual obligation and common provision, not self-interest or private prerogative, first. In that spirit, the cap on wages subject to the payroll tax, currently at the ludicrously low figure of $68,400, should be lifted. This alone will go a long way toward balancing the books. In a similar spirit of progressive taxation, some measure of means-testing for beneficiaries is also appropriate, as is raising the retirement age. Shoring up Social Security by increasing the FICA tax is problematic, especially because this tax falls disproportionately on those less able to pay. If needed, the Social Security system should also have access to money from general tax revenues, which are raised by the much more progressive income tax. Moreover, money earned from investments, now entirely exempt from FICA withholdings, should be taxed to help pay for Social Security. A tax on stock transactions specifically dedicated to Social Security is one idea. Such a levy might also help dampen the market's current speculative fervor.

Social Security has worked wonders, and people know it. Talk of privatization is premature if not financially imprudent, and vastly underestimates the popularity of the program and the willingness of Americans to tend to the common good as well as take care of the truly needy. In seeking a solution to Social Security's economic problems, defenders of the program should speak the language of economic fairness and common purpose, a language Social Security has given concrete expression to for more than sixty years. An ethic of communal obligation, not mere individual benefit, should play a greater role in shaping this nation's future.

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E.J. DIONNE, Jr.

A VICTORY OVER NIKE

And a win for sweatshop workers

Consumers and workers of the world, unite—Just do it! If you do, you can affect the behavior of manufacturing giants such as Nike, for whom image is everything.

Nike Inc.'s announcement last month that it would raise the minimum age for its workers and impose American air quality standards on its plants overseas marks a breakthrough for American and international human rights campaigners who have argued that basic liberties shouldn't stop at the factory door. It turns out that public shaming and consumer pressure can have a mighty impact on mighty manufacturers.

Philip H. Knight, Nike's chairman and chief executive, was remarkably candid during a speech this week at the National Press Club in acknowledging how much damage the critics had done to his company's image.

"It has been said that Nike has single-handedly lowered the human rights standards for the sole purpose of maximizing profits," he said. "The Nike product has become synonymous with slave wages, forced overtime, and arbitrary abuse. I truly believe that the American consumer does not want to buy products made in abusive conditions." Go for it, Phil.

The new commitments, Knight said—speaking at a moment when his company was flooding the airwaves with advertising around the National Basketball Association playoffs—reflect "who we are as a company."

There remains the small problem of living wages. "Sweatshops are known to the U.S. public as places where people work in miserable conditions for miserable wages," Medea Benjamin, director of Global Exchange, said in an interview. "Nike is addressing the miserable conditions, but a sweatshop is a sweatshop is a sweatshop unless you address miserable wages."

But Benjamin, whose San Francisco-based group has helped put labor rights on the human rights agenda, said the Nike moves were nonetheless significant. It's important, she said, that the company is accepting the principle that outside monitors should oversee its labor practices, and that it is agreeing to abide overseas by the environmental and safety standards set in American law. "If you can get Nike with enough pressure, you can get the whole industry," she said.

The Nike moves are a small step on a very long journey whose aim is to civilize the global economy. Around the world, unions and human rights groups have argued that a global trading system should be subject to labor and environmental rules, much as domestic economies are. Investors who favor global agreements to protect their financial assets ought to see the logic of similar rules to protect human assets—the people who work in the plants.

But enforceable global labor standards will not come easily. In the meantime, there is something called the marketplace and it gives consumers the right to make judgments: yes, about the quality of the products they buy, but also about the behavior of the companies that make them. It might surprise Karl Marx that consumer decisions based on a company's human rights record can affect sales and, in turn, Wall Street's judgments.

"A stain on one of the sterling brands of the century is reflecting itself in its stock price," says Ronald Blackwell, director of corporate affairs for the AFL-CIO, referring to Nike. The company had a 27 percent drop in earnings in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year, though Knight attributed this to the Asian financial crisis.

Blackwell argues that the next step is to recognize that ending the most egregious abuses in foreign factories is not enough. Reforms will endure, he said, only if workers have the right to speak up on their own behalf without fear of reprisal, physical violence, or jail terms. He notes that Nike has factories in Vietnam, China, and Indonesia, "three of the most difficult countries in the world for ensuring workers' rights."

Echoing the Polish union leaders who helped bring down communism, Blackwell said "totalitarian governments" that block "freedom of association and freedom of expression" for workers can render even the nicest sounding corporate codes of conduct unenforceable.

Perhaps the corporate execs could have a word or two with the leaders of the police states where they locate their factories, and gently suggest that human rights violations are becoming bad for business. And perhaps those who are rightly battling for religious liberty in such nations can link arms with those who want freedom's writ to run to those who make our Air Jordans. □

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ABIGAIL McCARTHY

TRIVIAL PURSUITS

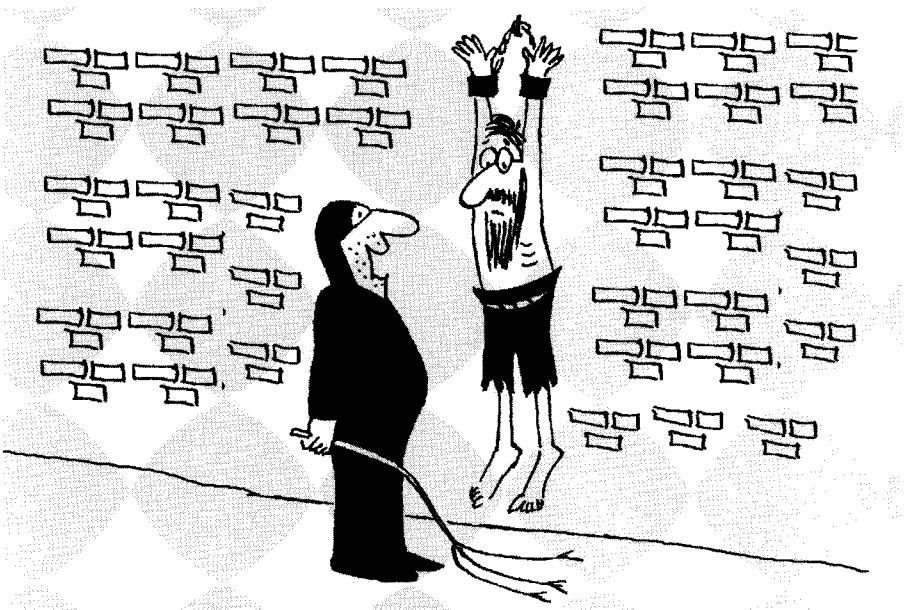
A daily dose of fluff and ills

There is mounting evidence that the media on which we depend for our knowledge of the world affect us powerfully, for good or for ill. There is also much evidence that we have come to distrust these same channels and to hold journalists in low esteem. In such a time the awarding of a Pulitzer Prize for civic journalism to the *Grand Forks* (North Dakota) *Herald* in April was heartening. The award recognized the paper's role in preserving the town's sense of community during the devastating flood there and its aftermath.

"I think the *Herald* in the days immediately after the flood was the identity of this town," said Mike Jacobs, the editor. "It went to residents of the community who were widely dispersed. It was a touchstone for them." The citation accompanying the prestigious Pulitzer Prize spoke in similar terms.

This is what a good newspaper can do. But newspapers and television news can do the opposite. A case in point is the way in which the reporting of crime news can negatively affect the way people view their own communities. Crime coverage has long been a staple in the news, but we have seen a steady rise in the time given to crime on evening news programs and the space allotted to it in the morning papers. And there are objections.

"You don't realize how much all this endless negativism tears down people's hopes," wrote one reader to the *Washington Post*'s ombudsman, Geneva Overholzer. Replying, Overholzer admitted that good news about crime—for example, a drop of 22 percent in overall crime and 29 percent in homicides—got little play in her paper, in contrast to the detailed daily reporting of murders, thefts, and muggings. She also took note of evidence showing that heavy watchers of TV news see the world as menacing, and tend to overestimate both the amount of crime in their communities and the criminal involvement of various ethnic groups.



"You can talk to me...I'm an investigative reporter and I never reveal my sources."

What effect, then, has the daily drumbeat coverage of the possible scandal involving President Clinton and an intern had on the national spirit? Clearly there has been an abandonment of personal standards, an increase of prurient curiosity, an addiction to the story resembling a fixation on soap opera. People are reading and listening. But since January the media have come under attack from many critics for overkill in their coverage.

Paul Newman, for one, spoke in a television interview with wondering disdain of the networks that pulled anchors from Cuba during the pope's visit—"an event of international importance"—to cover the Lewinsky story. In a press conference Betty Friedan scolded newspersons for their obsession with the salacious and speculative to the neglect of more important news. CBS's Dan Rather expressed disgust with the media frenzy over Lewinsky. Letters expressing similar sentiments have poured into newspapers and magazines. One reader told the *Post*, "Never in American history has so much been said by so many who know so little about nothing."

Although some journalists defend the media's performance on the ground that "it *is* news" and by citing the public's apparent appetite for the sordid, many others, to their credit, are critical. In an article in the April *American Journalism Review* about this give-and-take, writer Sherry Ricchiadi quotes Pulitzer-winner James V. Risser: "The speed with which this story developed and the willingness of news organizations to use poorly sourced information has caused some of the criticism and for good reason....It seems to me the media went out of control on this." MSNBC anchor Keith Olbermann, though he covered the story heavily himself, thinks journalists should exercise greater care. "I just can't imagine Walter Cronkite sitting there reading a story that argues about the meaningfulness of oral sex or giving graphic details on it."

This is the essential point: in the gradual progression from straight news to

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"soft news" over the past twenty years, journalists finally seem to have crossed the line. "Until now there have been topical subjects too grubby for anyone except comedians or the tabloids to touch, and on the other side of the bright media line were subjects of high consequence," wrote essayist Kurt Anderson (*New Yorker*, February 16). But now, "for the first time ever there is no line—it's both consequential and as grubby as it gets."

One way for print and television reporters and editors to buck this trend—and to regain public trust—is suggested by the *Grand Forks Herald* story; that is, by putting more emphasis on civic journalism in a time of diminishing straight news. Another is handling straight news—what happened yesterday—as just that: sticking to the facts, giving information, avoiding opinion. Journalists are now holding forums nationwide to examine their values and responsibilities. We must hope that they will experiment with what will restore trust and forge community. There could not be a more appropriate moment. □

Jorge Pedraza

THE EURO COMETH

Bringing unity or fratricide?

On May 2 in Brussels, in one of the boldest experiments of modern political economy, the European Union (EU) gave birth to the European Monetary Union (EMU). On January 1, 1999, the EMU will launch the new pan-European currency, the euro. Eleven countries—Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, and Ireland—are the founding members of what economists are calling Euroland. Greece is slotted to join by 2001. Britain, Sweden, and Denmark have opted not to join for now. With the launch of the euro the currencies of the Euroland states will be locked into a fixed set of exchange rates. The euro will become the official bookkeeping currency. On the eve of 2002, the euro will begin to circulate as notes and coins, and the national currencies will be retired from circulation. They will cease to exist except as souvenirs. The European Central Bank (ECB) will replace the central banks of the member nations and determine monetary policy for all of Euroland.

With 290 million people, 19.4 percent of the world's economic output, and 18.6 percent of world trade (as compared to the 270 million population of the United States, with its 19.6 percent of world GDP, and 16.6 percent of world trade), aggregated Euroland represents tremendous economic and financial power. No longer will the U.S. dollar be the sole world currency reserve, fine-tuning monetary policy to its own advantage. Euro boosters claim the EU will succeed in balancing the global center of gravity, pulling it away from the U.S. which has become an arrogantly titanic "king of the world." Supporters in France, always attuned to questions of grandeur, like to say that this millennial event is "the greatest thing to happen in Europe since Charlemagne."

European leaders have been talking up European economic integration with considerable persistence since the end of WWII. The Treaty of Rome proclaimed union as an eventual goal. The different incarnations of the pan-European association have never stopped talking about it. Picking up where Konrad Adenauer and Charles DeGaulle had left off, François Mitterand, sensing an uncannily familiar pull of the economic tide toward Germany, pushed in the 1980s for a monetary union that would "control" the Germans and their hegemonic *Bundesbank*. Ever since the "roaring" twenties during which tens of thousands of deutschmarks were needed to buy groceries, fear of inflation has been deeply etched into the German psyche. French politicians, on the other hand, manifest a symmetrically strong need to keep their hand on the economic pump, always ready to prime it with a little more currency flow when political circumstances demand. Consequently, the two countries do not exactly see eye-to-eye on fiscal policy. But France has always known how to push Germany's buttons with regard to residual war guilt and guilt about German economic success. In 1991, Europe's odd couple managed to corral each other and most of the rest of the Europe into the Maastricht treaty, which set the ground rules for the euro.

The last seven years have been lean ones for the plump governments of the EU that committed themselves to monetary union. To qualify for membership, annual budget deficits had to be reigned in to 3 percent of GDP, and the aggregate of public debt brought down to 60 percent of GDP. This was done in the midst of an economic stall in which unemployment has remained near 12 percent across the continent. The political stresses of this belt-tightening have been considerable. In France they led to the ouster of Jacques Chirac's parliamentary majority and abandonment of many of his government's plans to begin dismantling France's vast social insurance system. For their part, the German electorate, having had to swallow the huge costs of unification, is disgruntled. Quite unenthusiastic about the loss of their beloved deutschmark, they have made the once invulnerable Helmut Kohl, up for re-election in the fall, start to run scared. Tensions have run high from Italy to Finland as governments figure out ways to reign in spending while not getting voted out of office. The euro-chasers have all continually promised that monetary union will be precisely the thing that will bring good times to all.

No doubt Europe's forecasters foresaw the macro-economic cycle that is now showing itself. Europe, it seems, is entering into fat years, even before the euro is launched. Economic growth is picking up, inflation remains low, business investments and even that intractable beast, consumer confidence, are looking up. Even unemployment, the *bête noire*

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"Actually, it's not nearly as bad as I thought it would be."

of the past decade, has ticked ever so slightly down. The American boom economy and the Asian slump have actually helped pump capital into the stock markets and provide dynamic trade opportunities in both directions. The future looks rosy.

There are strong economic reasons beyond the traditional wishful thinking to suggest that the euro will succeed. With a unified currency the structural inefficiencies that constrained European business will vanish. An Italian manufacturer of kitchen tiles will now be able to do business with suppliers and buyers from anywhere in Euroland without having to fear being knocked into unprofitability by a sudden shift in exchange rates. Efficient and profitable, powerful pan-European businesses will emerge and grow through these newly delivered economies of scale, and become competitive with American and Asian companies.

But what about the politics of unification? It took something like ten minutes for the EU to approve the EMU in Brussels. It then took twelve hours to deal with Chirac's insistence that the European Central Bank president be French. The other ten EMU'ers had all agreed beforehand on Wim Duisenberg, the sober former Dutch central banker. Chirac's dogged persistence, however, almost derailed the entire proceedings. A compromise was reached when Duisenberg agreed to retire of his own free will after "about four" years when Chirac's candidate, Jean-Claude Trichet, the president of the Bank of France, would take over and remain in place for the full eight-year appointment. The unseemly row clearly embarrassed and annoyed most of the EU representatives. Even though in the end the markets shrugged it off, not a few see this as an ominous sign of what lies in store.

More than Chirac's or even France's nationalist ego is at stake. The reason French politicians like to manipulate the money supply is not simply because they like to play cause-and-effect with interest rates. Increasing the money supply is an efficient way to respond to very intense and very real political pressures. This option will no longer be available for the French or for any other national government in Euroland. As it now stands, Duisenberg and then Trichet, both equally conservative fiscally, will be setting a single and (one assumes) fairly high interest rate for the euro. Ireland or Portugal, whose economies are truly surging right now, and who want to temper inflation, have wildly different needs from those of France or Spain, which are very keen on generating job growth. There is no political process by which these conflicts can be resolved at the Euroland level. Will French sales managers go to Portugal or Denmark for job opportunities? Will Spanish engineers move to Ireland? or Finland? or Austria? Up until now there has been very little of this kind of labor flexibility in Europe. One could be optimistic about such mobility happening, at least with the upper level professional cadres and possibly younger Europeans. However, the bulk of Europeans are unlikely to want to move for jobs or opportunity.

More troublesome will be the political responses as one country perceives its economic hardship to be at the cost of another country's prosperity. National governments will be very constrained in how they respond to any such crises by way of taxes or labor legislation. They will need to remain within the budgetary parameters established by the EMU and avoid further aggravating unemployment. It is one thing for strikes and protests to be against a national government. But the tone and intensity of such activities change considerably when they are directed at another country, especially one which has been a traditional enemy in war. The nagging phenomenon of xenophobic right-wing politics in most of the Euroland nations gives a vivid picture of just how the wrong set of political chain reactions could get going.

The europrophets have been offering monetary union as a way out of the problems that have dogged the Old World's political economy for a decade. If it is true that Europe is in for seven fat years, then they will have seven years to figure out how to deal with the political pressures that intensify during an economic downturn. This is far from a sure thing. A real pan-European budget and extensive political coordination will have to be forged among groups of people who historically have been unable to come to consensus on issues trivial or urgent. At this point, with the Duisenberg fiasco fresh in mind, there is little reason to be highly optimistic. One hopes that as much progress will be made on this front as possible. The notion that Europeans are too civilized to go to war with each other is a lethal mistake that was made by many twice already this century. As recently as 1962 and the end of the Algerian war, French generals were seriously plotting to drop paratroopers on Paris and orchestrate a coup d'état. Could it happen again? □

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HEEDING THE NEW CREATION STORY

Farewell to formulaic prayers of petition

Chet Raymo

The earliest prayer I can remember is "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." Head on pillow, tiny palms pressed together, parent sitting close at hand, I sleepily mumbled the words. "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." The prayer was formulaic. It might as well have been a nursery rhyme, or a string of made-up words like "abracadabra." It was in fact an incantation, a magical plea to the powers of the universe to guide me through the little sleep of night into the light of another day.

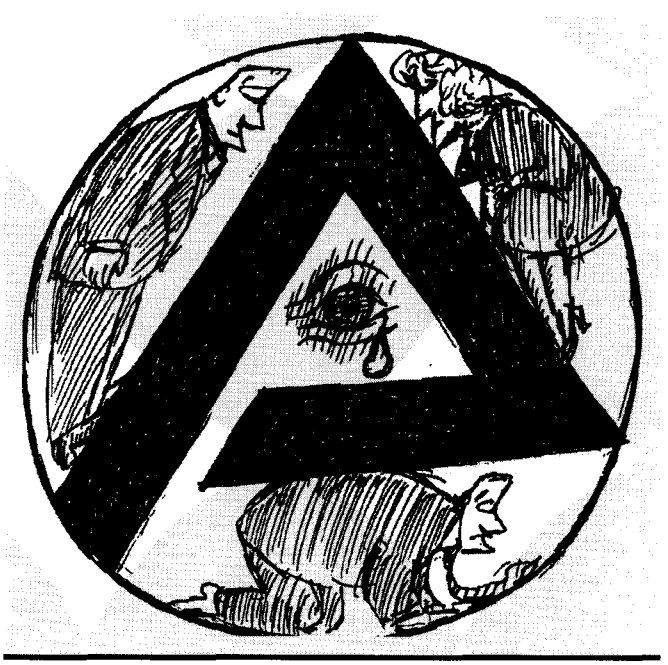
I was raised in a culture of petition, from an early age inculcated with a repertoire of formulaic prayers addressed to God, his angels, or his saints. All the prayers assumed a response: *Here I am, Lord, deserving of your attention, favor, healing, forgiveness.* Never did it pass my mind that my prayers were not heard. My education was hemmed about with a huge body of stories affirming God's intervention in human affairs. Had not every Catholic experienced firsthand the power of prayer—a return to health, a financial difficulty resolved, a lost object found? Were not the shrines full of abandoned crutches? Did not every chapel gleam with votive candles lit in thanks? The evidence of efficacy was overwhelming.

Or rather, the evidence for the efficacy of prayer appeared overwhelming to a mind predisposed to belief. Later, I trained as a scientist and also studied the history and philosophy of science. I learned something about controlled experiments, the statistical analysis of data, and the appropriate exercise of educated skepticism. Most importantly, I learned how belief can influence judgment—even the judgment of scientists—and how scientists seek to *minimize* the role of belief in the evaluation of evidence. No knowledge system can be entirely free of personal and cultural predispositions, which is why scientists place so much emphasis on peer review, mathematics, diagrams, photographs, specialized language, and the strict exclusion of personal, religious, political, and philosophical affiliations from scientific communication.

In the light of my new scientific skepticism, the evidence for the successes of petitionary prayer became a thing of smoke and mirrors, a compilation of mere anecdote. On the face of it, evidence for the *ineffectiveness* of petitionary prayer appears more convincing. Millions of Indians pray for sons rather than daughters, yet the sex ratio of Indian babies remains fairly even. Countless prayers offered for sovereigns and clergy produce no detectable extension of their lifetimes. According to one study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Christian Scientists pay a price for their confidence in the healing power of prayer: their median age at death is younger than that of their fellow citizens.

A medical context would seem to be the ideal environment to empirically test the efficacy of petitionary prayer; it is the only context in which we find large numbers of human subjects in a reasonably controlled scientific environment. Significantly, as part of a growing interest in alternative therapies, the therapeutics of prayer has lately received increased attention within the medical community.

Of course, no one denies that prayer might have a placebo effect. If patients in clinical trials are given sugar pills or other imitation treatment in place of real therapies, some—as many as a third—will nonetheless get better. Physicians ascribe the success of placebos to some as yet mysterious mind-body interaction. Prayer might heal in the same way: if you believe it helps, perhaps it will. Prayer might also achieve a therapeutic result through stress-reduction. Many physicians believe that relaxation leads to lower blood pres-



Chet Raymo's *most recent book is* Skeptics and True Believers: The Exhilarating Connection Between Science and Religion *(Walker and Company). He writes a weekly column on science for the* Boston Globe.

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sure, alleviation of hypertension, pain reduction, and other beneficial physical states. The scientific evidence for relaxation therapy is somewhat ambiguous. However, if relaxation exercises are therapeutic among certain populations of patients, then prayer or any relaxing meditation might produce the same results.

Neither the placebo effect nor therapeutic stress-reduction requires miraculous explanations, nor does either seriously challenge conventional medicine. Almost all scientists accept that mind and body interact in many complex ways that are as yet only poorly understood. But can prayer addressed to God on a patient's behalf—*without a patient's knowledge*—heal? On this matter, the medical literature is nearly silent.

In 1988, Randolph Byrd published study results in a *Southern Medical Journal* article that have been widely quoted as offering scientific evidence for the medical benefits of intercessory prayer. Over a ten-month period, Byrd randomly divided nearly four hundred patients in a coronary-care unit at the San Francisco General Medical center into two groups. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups upon admission. One group was prayed for by born-again Christians outside the hospital; the control group received no assigned prayer. Neither physicians nor patients knew to which group the patients had been assigned. According to Byrd, the patients who received intercessory prayer required less ventilatory assistance, antibiotics, and diuretics than the control group. His qualified conclusion: "Based on these data there seemed to be an effect [from intercessory prayer], and that effect was presumed to be beneficial."

Can prayer addressed to God on a patient's behalf—without a patient's knowledge—heal?

Byrd's study has been faulted on statistical and procedural counts, even by some who believe in the power of intercessory prayer. Furthermore, no significant differences were noted in such variables as length of hospital stay or mortality. These reservations are seldom mentioned when the results of Byrd's study are quoted, as, for example, in a 1996 *Time* magazine cover story on alternative healing strategies. Nor do we hear much about two earlier medical studies that failed to provide statistical support for the success of intercessory prayer.

Given the impossibility of knowing who has actually been prayed for, by whom, and how often, it is hard to imagine how any scientific study of intercessory prayer can be conclusive one way or the other. However, if Byrd's ostensibly positive results were somehow confirmed in an unambiguous way, it would certainly represent a stunning challenge to the scientific world view, which is disinclined to admit the willful intervention of God in the course of nature. Suffice to say, most of the medical community is highly skeptical.

But not universally so.

Larry Dossey is a physician and successful author who has made a name for himself as a proponent of alternative healing strategies, including prayer. He has expressed reservations about Byrd's study, but is open to the healing power of prayer, even if the patient is not aware of being prayed for. He argues for a new kind of medicine that takes account of a "collective mind," a mind not localized to brain or body.

The respected Harvard cardiologist Herbert Benson is another traditionally trained physician who is pushing for the scientific study of alternative therapies. He also recognized flaws in Byrd's study, but thinks intercessory prayer should be studied in a rigorous, scientific way. With his colleagues, Benson has designed a test of intercessory prayer that he believes will meet the strictest scientific standards. The study is funded by the Templeton Foundation, a private foundation that supports the use of scientific study to reveal knowledge of God.

A good scientist, Benson is interested in the causal mechanisms at work in alternative therapies, including prayer. And certainly, the mind-body connection is pretty much unexplored territory in science. Nevertheless, skepticism remains high among scientists.

Believers in the power of intercessory prayer are unlikely to be dissuaded by a dearth of respectable scientific support; after all, God in his omniscience may simply refuse to cooperate with any empirical test of his power. However, many persons, such as myself, who are skeptical of miracles and respectful of experiment, are left with rather a hole in our lives. We were taught that God hears and answers prayers; a careful examination of the evidence reveals no compelling measure of response.

For many of us, the hole in our lives has been filled by a new story of the creation that does not require a God who interferes in the day-to-day unfolding of events: an evolutionary story that reaches inward to the ceaseless dance of the DNA and outward to the spiraling galaxies. It is a scientific story that places human life and consciousness squarely in a cosmic flow of complexifying energy. This new story is solidly grounded in the empirical method, but open to revision as we learn more.

The Roman Catholic priest and cultural historian Thomas Berry urges us to assimilate the new story into our religious

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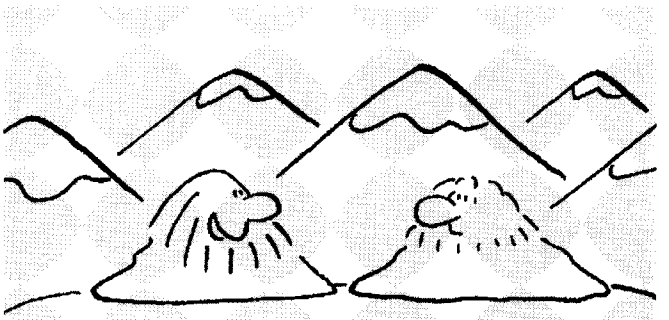
and prayer lives. He writes, "The universe, the solar system, and the planet earth in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being." The forms of religious belief that have guided us in the past are inadequate to energize the future, he says. The ancient Christian creation story has functioned well in its institutional efficiency and moral efficacy, but it is no longer the integral story of the Earth or humankind. It is a sectarian story, focused on the personality of the Savior and the interior spiritual processes of the faithful. It has become "dysfunctional." For Berry, the significance of the new scientific creation story is this: The universe is a unity, an interacting, evolving, and genetically related community of beings bound together inseparably in space and time. Our responsibilities to each other, to the planet, and to all creation are implicit in this unity. Each of us is profoundly implicated in the functioning and fate of every other being on the planet.

So far, the majority of religious people have recoiled from the new scientific creation story, instead seeking security and comfort in Scriptures and traditions that derive from an older, more human-centered cosmology. In the older cosmology, an Olympian God mostly listens and responds individually to our prayers. In the new cosmology, God reveals himself in and through his creation, as law and chaos, light and darkness, creator and destroyer. He is, in the words of the Jesuit theologian David Toolan, "the Unnamable One/Ancient of Days of the mystics, of whom we can only speak negatively (not this, not that), a 'wholly other' hidden God of Glory." Or again, in the words of the Greek novelist Nikos Kazantzakis: "We might have given it any other name we wished: Abyss, Mystery, Absolute Darkness, Absolute Light, Matter, Spirit, Ultimate Hope, Ultimate Despair, Silence. But we have named it God because only this name, for primordial reasons, can stir our hearts profoundly. And this deeply felt emotion is indispensable if we are to touch, body with body, the dread essence beyond logic." The God of the new story does not take note of our childish cry: *Here I am, Lord, deserving of your attention, favor, healing, forgiveness.* Rather, he sweeps us along on the grand wings of his abiding plan and presence.

How are we to pray in such a universe, to such a God? Thomas Merton says, "The option of absolute despair is turned into perfect hope by the pure and humble supplication of monastic prayer." He defines monastic prayer as "a prayer of silence, simplicity, contemplative and meditative unity, a deep personal integration in an attentive, watchful listening of 'the heart.'" Learning to pray, then, as I understand it, is learning to listen with the mind and heart—making oneself attentive to what the poet Mary Oliver calls "the light at the center of every cell." It is a fearsome task, best suited to solitude and silence. Our prayers are not answered with miraculous gifts, tagged with our names or those of loved ones, but with beauty and terror. For the prayerful listener, the world becomes the sublime scripture, full of stories of structure and chaos, law and chance, complexification and decay, including the individual stories of the human persons in whom the universe becomes conscious of itself.



"A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, but we're safe up here."

David Toolan writes: "We are here to make sacraments of nature—signs that give grace, life, hope—whether in raising a family, educating children, running a corporation, governing a city, searching for a synthesis of all physics, collecting garbage. All such activity takes nature's energy and transforms it, tries to pour soul into it, makes poetry of it, a thing of beauty. Liturgy is the big clue: here we regularly take fossil fuels, stone, metals, silicon, water, fire, grain, grape, animal stuffs, air waves, and sound—indeed, as much of space-time as we can sensuously lay our hands on—convert it into a gathering of voices, a ceremony of praise and thanksgiving."

Praise and thanksgiving: these are enduring motives for prayer. All of my life has been a re-learning to pray—a letting go of incantational magic, petition, and the vain repetition "me, Lord, me": instead watching attentively for "the light at the center of every cell," listening for the "dread essence beyond logic." It is a watching and a listening that is informed by science, because reliable knowledge is a prerequisite for love. "Less and less do I see any difference between research and adoration," wrote the great Jesuit scientist and theologian Teilhard de Chardin near the end of his life. A scientific experiment that rebuts the effectiveness of intercessory prayer could itself be a revelation of God's *modus operandi* in the world. Let me watch and pray, then, in utter silence, or aloud in a gathering of like-minded souls, raising our voices in praise and thanksgiving. Prayer is for me now being mindful of a story—the story of the unfolding of life and consciousness in a universe of godly dimension—an activity summed up in Saint Augustine's words *Noverim te, noverim me*, "May I know you, may I know myself." □

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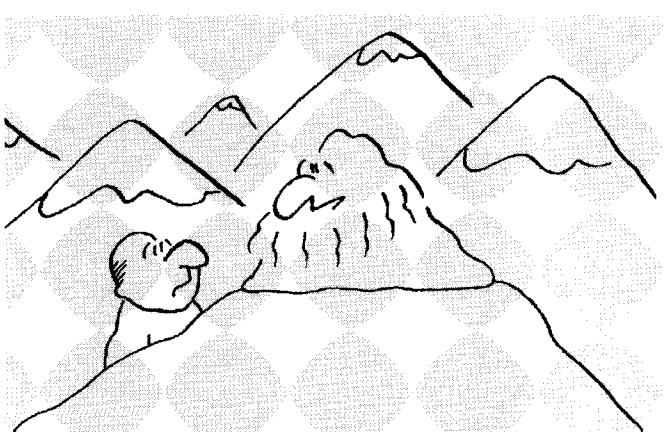
John H. Wright

Underestimating the biblical God

Our view of prayer usually reflects our view of God and our relationship to him. The God with whom Chet Raymo begins is one who can be manipulated by magical incantation. Saying certain words and performing certain actions are thought to control or at least influence the Ruler of the Universe. The author discovered, however, that God is not influenced by magic formulas, nor pleased with the mindless repetition of words. He came to recognize God at the heart of the evolutionary process of the universe, holding all things together in a profound, mysterious, and dynamic movement that has finally given birth to the created conscious intelligence of human beings. This is God beyond magic and the simple recitation of formulas. Prayer to this God is marked by praise and thanksgiving, arising from wonder at the majesty of the universe and the sweep of the creative process.

What led Raymo to this development was acquaintance with the methods and conclusions of science. But he could have found it in the Bible. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautions: "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words" (Matt. 6:7); and Sirach advises: "Do not babble in the assembly of the elders, and do not repeat yourself when you pray" (Sir. 7:14).

However, Raymo's God raises further questions. Does this God simply occupy a general supervisory position in the world, or does his care reach the vast array of individual beings, both in their distinctness and in their relations to one another? In one place Raymo says that God "sweeps us along on the grand wings of his abiding plan...." Here Raymo seems to opt for God as the general supervisor. But elsewhere Raymo favorably cites the poet Mary Oliver who speaks of "the light at the center of every cell." This accords better with a God whose knowledge, wisdom, and concern bring every detail of our unfolding universe into clear focus. It is also the biblical view of God. Jesus tells his apostles as he is about to send them out on mission: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs on your head are all counted" (Matt. 10:29-30).



"I don't know what the secret of human happiness is, but it sure ain't mountaintops."

At this point we need to do two things: (1) pursue this insight into a God who overlooks nothing, and (2) ask about the relevance of experimental evidence in resolving the question of petitionary prayer.

In view of this understanding of God, we should recognize that God's attitude toward things takes into account the differences among them. As Jesus said immediately after the words quoted above: "So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:31). God regards not just the physical size of things but also their degree of complexity. As a result, conscious intelligent beings occupy a uniquely important position among them, as the most complex beings in the universe. Is there then any sense in which God relates to these complex beings and interacts with them personally? If God does indeed deal with the universe so that there is "light at the center of every cell," it is not unreasonable to suppose that such interaction takes place.

The Bible as it treats petitionary prayer, while rejecting magic, everywhere supposes that there is a personal relationship between God and the one who prays. For example, also in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches: "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Matt. 7:9-11).

True petitionary prayer, Raymo rightly notes, is neither a magical incantation, nor the rote repetition of a formula, nor telling God something he doesn't know, nor an attempt to persuade him to do something he doesn't want to do. It is an expression of personal trust and dependence. It always aims first at deepening this personal relationship, and secondarily at obtaining a concrete request. As in personal relationships between human beings, it is the relationship that really counts, not the gifts or favors that are asked and given. Such things must always be seen within the context of the personal relationship. Hence, petitionary prayer always has certain conditions expressed or implied: if what I ask will not hinder my love and service of you and my fellow human beings, if something else will not better achieve what your love and wisdom intend.

That is why prayer is always answered: the personal re-

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lationship is always deepened and strengthened, and the gift is given if indeed it will promote this relationship. We shouldn't conclude that, since God will always do what is best for us, it makes no difference whether we ask him or not. God will indeed do what is best for us, if we are willing for him to do it. God seeks first of all to deepen his personal relationship with us; and our prayers of petition are expressions of our willingness for him to do this. Ideally, children ask from their parents with trust and confidence for what they will truly need to live and grow toward the truth. In a similar fashion, God responds to prayer with gifts of forgiveness, encouragement, and also material benefits, as he sees these are truly helpful.

This does not suppose that every answer to petitionary prayer is a miraculous occurrence. The world and all that happens in it are in God's hands. Modern science has taught us that the world is not ruled by rigid determinism. God can reply to our prayers without going beyond the limits of physical possibility, even if the reply may be highly improbable. Operating within each thing and inclining it accordingly to his purpose, God can, without interrupting the network of causal activity that holds the world together, bring about what he wants. This is similar to the way in which the mind influences the body without suspending the ordinary laws of physics and chemistry.

What about experimental verification of the power of petitionary prayer? Valid experiments require control of all the relevant factors. And it seems that, for the most part at least, this is not possible with regard to petitionary prayer. In the New Testament, James observes: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3). If our words in prayer spring from this kind of selfish concern, or if they reveal a desire to control God rather than to grow in his friendship and service, then they will not be answered. But how can a pollster determine this? And even if we truly pray well, how can we know that what we ask for is in our best interest and the best interest of all concerned? This means that experiments can neither confirm nor disprove the power of petitionary prayer.

Petitionary prayer is only one element in a total situation of trust and confidence in God, just as asking and receiving are parts of a total family situation. But in neither case does this activity constitute the whole situation. We ask in trust and confidence, and, in the same spirit, we trust that God hears and answers us. It is the atmosphere generated by this kind of prayer that enables us to relate to God as one "who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20). □

John H. Wright, S.J., *is the author of* A Theology of Christian Prayer *(Liturgical Press, 1979).*

Phillip E. Johnson

Overestimating the power of science

In 1981, the United States National Academy of Sciences passed a resolution saying that "Religion and science are separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought whose presentation in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief." The statement was intended only for use in a public-relations campaign against the creation science movement, and it has never been invoked against evolutionary pantheists, agnostics, or scientific materialists. For example, the Academy makes no protest when Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*) uses the authority of science to promote atheism, or when physicists promote a "theory of everything" that will allow its possessors to "know the mind of God," or when Carl Sagan proclaimed in his Cosmos series that "the Cosmos is all there is, or ever was, or ever will be." On the contrary, the National Academy gave Sagan its Public Welfare medal.

Chet Raymo is another in the long line of scientific metaphysicians who yearn to make a religion out of science; and so he argues that Christians should adopt for religious purposes what he calls "the new creation story." His description of the new story is more in poetic than scientific language, as befits an admirer of Teilhard de Chardin, but he clearly is referring to the standard version of evolutionary naturalism. According to this story, nature did its own creating through unintelligent material processes, particularly the purposeless Darwinian mechanism of random mutation and natural selection. God was involved if at all only in the very beginning, in setting up the laws, and thereafter nature runs by itself. In Raymo's words, nature itself "becomes the sublime scripture," humans are viewed as the universe becoming conscious of itself through evolution, and prayer consists of rejecting miracles while giving praise and thanksgiving to nature.

The National Academy's motives may have been partisan, but there is clearly some truth in its warning that mixing science with religion can produce a highly intoxicating brew. Teilhard's comment that "less and less do I see any difference between research and adoration," which Raymo quotes with approval, is about as far from the ideal of scientific objectivity as one can go. When scientists begin to worship their own concepts, they are tempted to proclaim vast philosophical systems rather than stick to what the data is showing.

So it was with Teilhard, and so it is with evolution-wor-

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shipers generally. The first thing to understand about Raymo's "new story" is that scientists cannot prove that known natural forces can produce complex biological organisms. They assume this crucial and highly debatable fact, regardless of the evidence. No one has demonstrated that chemical evolution can produce life in the first place. Indeed this field is in a state of confusion and cannot even begin to account for the information content of the simplest organisms. Despite what you were told in school and in countless public television nature programs, natural selection has no substantial creative power. Ask for evidence and all you will get are examples of trivial variations in fundamentally stable populations. Look at the fossils and you will see a general pattern of unexplained sudden appearances of new forms of life followed by *stasis*—meaning the absence of fundamental evolutionary change. Neo-Darwinism is more accurately classified as materialist mythology than as science.

The highly regarded Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin explained the true basis of evolutionary science in a remarkably candid essay in the *New York Review of Books* (January 9, 1997). Lewontin has as low an opinion of the adaptationist "just-so" stories of the neo-Darwinists as I do. In spite of his skepticism, however, he accepts the basic story of evolutionary naturalism because, in his own words,

> We have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.

If you are going to define science as applied materialist philosophy, then of course you are going to end up with a materialist creation story, one that excludes the possibility of a personal God who created us and answers prayer. Just don't make the mistake of thinking that this new story has been validated by scientific testing. The important questions are all decided in the assumptions and definitions.

In fact the new story is rapidly becoming an old story and it may not be around much longer, even in the scientific world. For a look at the way things are going, see the recent article in the *Boston Review* by James A. Shapiro, professor of microbiology at the University of Chicago, with the provocative title "Scientific Alternatives to Darwinism: Is There a Role for Cellular Information Processing in Evolution?" (The *Boston Review* is available on the Web [http://www-polisci.mit.edu/BostonReview/].) Just to give the flavor of the article, here is a string of excerpts:

> The molecular revolution has revealed an unanticipated realm of complexity and interaction more consistent with computer technology than with the mechanical viewpoint which dominated when the neo-Darwinian modern synthesis was formulated.... It has been a surprise to learn how thoroughly cells protect themselves against the kinds of accidental genetic change that, according to conventional theory, are the sources of evolutionary variability.... The point of this discussion is that our current knowledge of genetic change is fundamentally at variance with postulates held by neo-Darwinists.... Is there any guiding intelligence at work in the origin of species displaying exquisite adaptations that range from lambda prophage repression and the Krebs cycle through the mitotic apparatus and the eye to the immune system, mimicry, and social organization?

Shapiro takes jabs at both the Creationists and the neo-Darwinists, accusing both groups of "presenting a static view of the scientific enterprise." He blames Creationists for refusing to credit the successes of science, but also comments that, when faced with new ideas, neo-Darwinists "assume a defensive posture of outraged orthodoxy and assert an unassailable claim to truth, which only serves to validate the Creationists' criticism that Darwinism has become more of a faith than a science."

James Shapiro plays by the same scientific rules that Richard Lewontin does, and so he is still talking about the origin of cellular information-processing systems as a problem in "evolution." But the systems he describes are analogous to sophisticated computers, and there is no known natural process that can produce anything of that kind. Scientifically, Shapiro's program is identical to that of Michael Behe, the molecular biologist (and Roman Catholic) author of *Darwin's Black Box* (1997). The difference is that Shapiro tries to use language that scientific materialists can conceivably tolerate, whereas Behe dares to make the obvious inference that the evidence of biology points unambiguously to design, and hence to the reality of a Designer.

In short, Chet Raymo is urging Christians to rely for their salvation on a theory derived from materialist philosophy, rather than from scientific testing. Since scientific materialists don't hesitate to give advice to religious people, I suggest religious people should return the favor. Let's gently advise the evolutionary scientists that they need to cultivate a bit more of that objectivity they are always recommending to others. They could make a start by learning to tell the difference between what they assume and what they investigate. □

Phillip E. Johnson *is professor of law at the University of California, Berkeley. His most recent book is* Defeating Darwinism—By Opening Minds *(Intervarsity, 1997).*

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Richard Alleva

MISERERE MEI

'Butcher Boy' & 'Les Misérables'

Let me do Neil Jordan's interesting new movie *The Butcher Boy* a terrible injustice by telling you what's in it. Drunkenness. Suicide. Vandalization of a house by defecation. Madness. Hallucination. Child abuse. Brawling. The slaughter of animals. The slaughter and dismemberment of a woman. A corpse rotting in a parlor. A near-suicide by immolation. A child charred from head to toe. And...oh yes, a vision of the Virgin Mary (portrayed, so help me, by Sinead O'Connor!) who here uses the f-word and winks seductively at the boy who's dreaming of her.

You don't want to see this catalogue of horrors, do you? Of course not. So just flip the page to the next article and join me in two weeks.

There. Now let me confess to those of you who have inexplicably continued reading that as I watched *The Butcher Boy* I couldn't stop laughing. And the audience about me (a full house) was laughing harder than I. How can this be?

The Butcher Boy is about what human consciousness does when it is in constant peril of humiliation. Twelve-year-old Francie Brady hears a neighbor woman denounce publicly his drunken father and mentally fragile mother. For any boy living in a small Irish town in the early '60s where everybody knows everybody else, this would be bad enough. But for Francie, who dreams about the happy home and personal dignity he's never enjoyed, it is a monumental catastrophe. So the boy's defenses go up. They include fantasies fed by TV shows and comic books, bravura lies, fits of violence, idealization of his only friend (a level-headed boy whose very level-headedness finally estranges him from Francie), and a vendetta against that denouncing neighbor whose own son enjoys all the advantages Francie has always been denied. But, most of all, Young Brady defends himself by creating within his own skull a sort of ongoing vaudeville show of which he is the host and indefatigably spieling star. No matter what happens to the boy—the tragic loss of both parents, physical assaults on him and by him, hallucinations, sexual molestation, confinements in reform school, asylum, and prison—"The Francie Brady Show" never receives anything less than great reviews and fantastic ratings from its one and only audience: Francie Brady himself.

But "one and only"is not quite accurate. For we watch "The Francie Brady Show," too. It is Neil Jordan's triumph that, though we never lose sight of what is really happening to the boy, we are caught up in the vaudeville that our hero has made of his life. That is why the movie, like the Patrick McCabe novel it faithfully adapts, makes us laugh. Out of the wrong side of the mouth, through tears, with a sick sensation at the pit of the belly, but laugh we do.

Jordan has brought off this stunt through the following devices. He's kept the camera's perspective shallow, so that the action is as "in-our-face" as any TV sitcom. Depth-of-focus might have given this movie a clarity and objectivity that would have rendered its horrible events unbearable. And he's evoked from his cast near-farcical performances which turn the characters into members of Francie's comedy troupe. But, just as McCabe's novel permits us to detect realities that Francie's addled mind can't deal with, Jordan's direction allows his actors a moderate degree of realism so they don't all come across as mere puppets of Francie's dementia. It's a layered effect: what Francie perceives and doesn't perceive are both visible to us. We live within his insanity without being deluded by it.

Occasionally though, Jordan's staging does completely surrender to Francie's twisted perceptions, and it is precisely then that the movie becomes most like music hall. The delinquents whom Francie meets in reform school are just ordinary farmboys who've run afoul of the law. But when our hero labels them "The Bog Boys," they turn into strolling players capering in unison. Similarly, the gossipy ladies in a grocery store are just that, but they are also a comic chorus galvanized into eyerolling and lip-smacking by the boy's boasts and lies. And the offscreen voice of the adult Francie who narrates the movie quizzes and heckles the on-screen juvenile Francie like a comic badgering his "straight man."

Not all of the movie works so well. The parallels McCabe and Jordan try to draw between the boy's growing insanity and the madness of the cold war (the movie climaxes during the Cuban missile crisis) seem forced to me, because what torments Francie—parental irresponsibility, the malice and snoopiness of neighbors, poverty's subversion of dignity—would have tormented him in the nineteenth

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century or earlier. The supporting cast (including author McCabe as the town drunk) is uniformly apt but, though Jordan gets some nice moments from Eamon Owens as Francie, this novice actor can't deliver all the shadings the character needs to engage us completely. The director has revved the boy up for every scene and, in a film as hectic as this one, the childish shouting grows tiresome. Worst of all is Jordan's failure to dramatize the destruction of Francie's most cherished dream: the blissful honeymoon his parents supposedly enjoyed at a seaside hotel. A lyrical dream sequence was called for to show how much this fantasy mattered but, surprisingly, the director treats it perfunctorily.

Otherwise, *The Butcher Boy* succeeds as a piteous comedy of horrors. It marks a return to form for Neil Jordan after the conventional bustle and posturing of *Michael Collins*. That movie biography needed a master of spectacle like David Lean at its helm. Jordan is something else: a bad boy with a heart, a purveyor of shock who can also tug at heartstrings.

Life is unfair, especially at the movies. The current version of *Les Misérables* is nowhere near as inventive an adaptation as *The Butcher Boy*, nor does it cram as much of Hugo's novel within its two-and-a-quarter hour running time as the 1935 Hollywood entry (which was twenty-five minutes shorter!). But it doesn't matter. Inferior in artistry to *The Butcher Boy*, *Les Misérables* nevertheless grips just as hard. It seems that if a director can get Hugo's big set pieces right (the bishop's candlesticks, the overnight rescue of Cosette, the death agony of Fantine, the escape through the sewers, the final confrontation of Valjean and Javert), whatever is done to the connective tissue in between tends to fade from memory.

Rafael Yglesias's script is a Reader's Digest Abridged Books skim-job that soon turns into Evelyn Wood speed-reading. Yet the writing doesn't completely lack subtlety. For instance, Yglesias manages to suggest that *both* Valjean's brutalization in prison *and* his spiritual reformation turned him into something of a sexual puritan and, consequently, a rather stifling father to Cosette. Therefore, the girl's rebellious love for Marius the revolutionary seems psychologically inevitable.

Bille August has never been the most limber of directors even at his best (*Pelle the Conqueror*). His work here ranges from the cut-rate (the sewer escape needs more murk and more labyrinthine perilousness) to the first-rate (Javert's suicide truly shocks, and if I hadn't been familiar with the story, would have caught me off guard). Although I sense that August didn't have the funds necessary for all the spectacle he had in mind, the costumes are magnificent. In fact, in one scene a mother superior's headgear almost upstages Liam Neeson.

Nothing else does. The key to playing Valjean is to suggest fathomless goodness within invincible animality, as if the soul of Francis of Assisi had transmigrated into the body of a Kodiak bear. Whether lifting the cart off the crushed worker (and Neeson is the only star actor around, aside from Arnold Schwarzenegger, who looks physically capable of that feat) or tenderly watching his adopted daughter brush her hair, this Irish actor has captured Hugo's saintly brute to perfection. As his policeman-nemesis, Geoffrey Rush is an electric current skimpily fleshed, the perfect foil for Neeson's brawny humanity. Claire Danes pleases as Cosette, and Uma Thurman has a good time, as all beautiful actresses do, making herself look tubercular and ugly. The supporting cast is fine, especially Peter Vaughan, who makes the bishop's loving nature almost palpable. (How much better than Cedric Hardwicke's desiccated rectitude in the 1935 version.)

But the real hero of this film is neither Yglesias nor August nor the costume designer nor even Neeson or Rush. It is Hugo: poet, populist, and future powerhouse of the West End, Broadway and Hollywood. □

STAGE

Celia Wren

SCHEMING SPOUSES

'The Herbal Bed' & 'Golden Child'

In *The Herbal Bed*, Peter Whelan's ponderous drama about morality and Shakespeare's daughter, a serving girl collapses from vertigo in Worcester Cathedral. And who can blame her? She is about to commit perjury in diocesan court. And when she looks up at the building's soaring heights, she thinks she sees God the Judge.

The play asks us to view the incident as a tinge of historical color: It is the summer of 1613, when Shakespeare was dying, when cathedrals were skyscrapers, and people were not embarrassed to talk about God. With its self-conscious gravity, the moment is typical of *The Herbal Bed*, a thoughtful but entirely humorless work that guttered briefly on Broadway this spring, before indifference snuffed it out.

How high is Worcester Cathedral? How closely does any society hold its faith? *The Herbal Bed*—like another recent Broadway offering, David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*—uses religious belief as a measuring rod to gauge its characters' alienation from the culture that surrounds them.

The Herbal Bed, which had a successful run in England before its luckless journey westward, is based on a historical event: a lawsuit brought, and won, by Susanna Shakespeare Hall against an acquaintance who had publicly accused her of adultery. Letting the Bard lurk behind the scenes, a ghostly, invisible presence, Whelan fleshes out this anecdote to ask a solemn question: Does duty to one's conscience outweigh a duty to others?

Guilty in intent but not in fact, the spirited Susanna (Laila Robins) struggles to

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persuade her tortured, deeply religious lover Rafe Smith (Armand Schultz) to lie, committing a small wrong for the sake of a greater good. At stake is the career of her husband, the brilliant physician John Hall (Tuck Milligan) who wages war against disease using the plants in his garden—the eponymous herbal bed.

In the New York production (directed, as in London, by Michael Attenborough) the garden's rainforest-green leaves clustered thick as kudzu around a pavilion's wooden frame, providing an ironically sylvan setting for the skirmishes and illicit meetings of Act I. (The set was designed by David Jenkins.) As if taking their cue from rampant vegetation, tropes of sickness and healing proliferate through the script.

Should we see illness as a punishment from God, wonders the amiable, puttering Bishop of Worcester (Herb Foster)? Or should we, rather, focus on God's curative powers: the garden as a "demonstration of his strength"? The sinister Vicar General (Simon Jones), a zealous Puritan (who in the Broadway production looked like an oversized chess piece, with a lace ruff in choke hold round his neck) would rather ignore the body's welfare altogether; presiding as grand inquisitor over the Act II trial, he harangues Susanna on the century's spiritual sickness: "the moral void of our times—the retreat from grace."

Such interplay of metaphor and idea might make *The Herbal Bed* a powerful meditation on the nature of spiritual health. Instead, the play remains a hodgepodge of none-too-subtle images welded to abstraction—like a John Donne poem gone wrong. Whelan's thematic lattice cannot support the emotion piled on it. The intense passions of otherwise inscrutable characters, expressed in hyperventilating rhetoric, are often ludicrous, as when Susanna, dressed in her nightgown, falls to her knees in the garden, comparing the stars to "a thousand eyes."

Susanna herself should provide the key to the entire drama. Her courageous, compassionate vision of the universe ("Hate is the sin, not love!") provides the play's ultimate healing force. Through Susanna, Whelan has given the work a definite feminist slant. "Honesty is not one thing!" his heroine cries, seeing complexity where the male establishment has ordained the stark duality of truth and falsehood.

But which is the real Susanna—the selfless physician's assistant, cleaning vials with vinegar, or the accomplished liar? As realized by the glamorous Robins, whose every word might have been filtered through Harvey's Bristol Cream, Susanna often appeared downright shifty. And as a result, her conviction that "love's kingdom has its own laws" seemed simply an expression of rebellion against a society that kept her from being a doctor in her own right.

Whelan is just as cagey when it comes to the other characters' beliefs. Rafe Smith and John Hall are apparently die-hard Puritans. But—unless we count Smith's self-recriminations after bowing to the Bishop—we never learn what faith means to either of these men. And while Jones gave the production's best performance as the steely-eyed Vicar, the character remained a cartoon villain, a foil for the improbably visionary Susanna.

The play alludes frequently to the conflicts of the Reformation. But the religious conflicts in *The Herbal Bed* are designed for appearance only, like an artificial Romantic garden shaped, through painstaking labor, to seem the work of nature.

Like Whelan's play, *Golden Child* depicts the anguish people feel when forced to choose between conflicting values. And Hwang (best known as the author of *M. Butterfly*) also works thwarted love, grudges, and low-key intrigue into a historical setting: in this case, Southeast China in 1918–1919.

Andrew Kwong (Randall Duk Kim) maintains an uneasy connubial equilibrium with three women: the formidable First Wife (Tsai Chin), an aging opium addict with a wry sense of humor; the duplicitous, resentful Second Wife (Kim Miyori); and the gentle Third Wife (Ming-Na Wen), Kwong's true love. Veiling insults in courtesy, the women vie for Kwong's attention in and around their compound's three golden pagodas (Tony Straiges designed the elegantly simple set).

But the days of traditionalism are over. Kwong's travels have introduced him to Verdi, cuckoo clocks, waffle irons, and other Western ways, including Christianity—a religion that, to his mind, has one salient advantage: monogamy. As his overtures to a jovial Anglican missionary (John Horton) make Kwong's intention to convert—and choose just one spouse—increasingly plain, the wives revolt, scheme, plead, and Westernize in varying degrees; the household spirals toward tragedy.

Golden Child underwhelmed critics when it originally opened in 1996, and, though since rewritten, remains seriously flawed (although it did win three Tony nominations, including one for best play). The production, directed by James Lapine, features some shrewd character portraits—Chin's majestic, wisecracking First Wife, in particular—but it suffers from Hwang's insistence on vocalizing the subtext. The play never hints at truths when it can wallop the audience over the head with them. In case we are too dense

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to understand the central theme, for example, First Wife intones: "When change comes, it comes like fire—no one knows who will live and who will be lost."

But the flame of change, burning through the household, does not entirely destroy the old truths. Kwong invites disaster when he forces his wives to accept baptism and stop offering ceremonial gifts to their ancestors. But the clumsily staged scenes that frame the body of the play put a hokey, optimistic spin on things. To the clash of Peking opera cymbals, the wizened ghost of Kwong's fundamentalist Christian daughter (Julyana Soelistyo) appears to her agnostic son (a role doubled by Kim), and persuades him of the importance of family. Respect for the past, once a form of ancestor worship, has become a source of secular identity in an inconstant universe.

The fire of change is a transforming fire, *Golden Child* suggests. *The Herbal Bed*, by projecting the forces of change onto the personality of an inspired idealist, suggests the same. Were the *Golden Child* more subtle with its meaning, and *The Herbal Bed* more honest with its characters, the phoenix might struggle up more convincingly from the ashes. □

MEDIA

Frank McConnell

NO WAY TO EXIT?

Seinfeld as Sartre

So, what did you think about the last episode of "Seinfeld?" I asked my class on the morning of May 15.

"It sucked," said a girl in the front row, and two hundred heads nodded in agreement. Later that day, when my wife picked me up, she told me both her classes reached the same consensus. And when we got home and checked out the newspaper, we found that the Associated Press guy panned it too: unfocused, rambling, not funny. So I have to bet that if you watched it you agree with our students and the A.P.

And here I am, your trusted media wallah, master of my domain, to tell you that you're wrong, wrong, wrong.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Look. The fun of writing a novel is writing the first sentence and the most herniatingly difficult part, apart from the stuff in the middle, is writing the last sentence. Literary critics and psychologists love to talk about "closure," but really getting there is tough. How do you know when you're done? And doesn't it have to be the same for a sitcom of the quality of "Seinfeld," which was essentially a nine-year, episodic comedy of manners (albeit bad manners)—in other words one of the best written, best acted, most consistent TV novels in the history of the technology? (Virginia Woolf once observed that there are three rules for writing a novel, but, unfortunately, nobody knows what they are.)

So here's what Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David, the original writers, did, and it's brilliant.

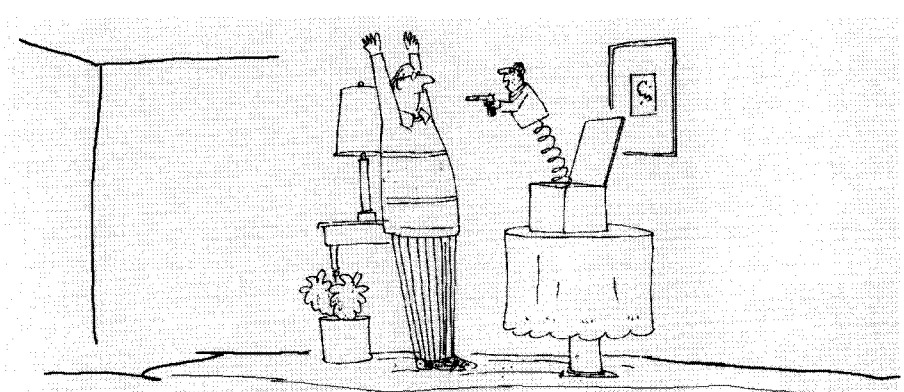
Since early on in the series, Jerry and George Costanza—George, the Jim Thorpe of fecklessness—have been trying to sell their idea for a "show about nothing"—i.e. "Seinfeld" itself—to NBC. As the last episode begins, Jerry gets a phone call from NBC in Hollywood. They're going to buy the show. Jerry and George are to leave New York for California, to make the idea of the TV show, "Jerry," the reality of the TV show, "Seinfeld" (got a little shiver of systematic self-consciousness up your spine, there?).

But before Jerry and George leave, NBC—here's the only hard-to-buy departure from reality—grants them a trip in a private jet anywhere in the world with Kramer and Elaine. They choose Paris. But after the plane takes off Kramer begins stomping madly about the cabin. He's got water in his ear, you see, because he's just come from the beach, and....(Do you know how hard it is getting any "Seinfeld" plot down in properly grammatical, subordinated sentences? It's like trying to herd gerbils.)

Anyhow. Kramer's stomping causes some malfunction in the plane, which is forced to land for minor repairs in a small Massachusetts town. Strolling through town, Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer witness a guy being robbed, at gunpoint, in clear daylight. Kramer videotapes the heist, while the other three make sarcastic comments—recorded, natch, on the tape.

And the quartet is then busted by the cops. Seems there's a new Massachusetts law, making anyone who witnesses a crime without trying to assist the victim liable to up to five years in prison.

Now comes the genius. Anybody who's watched the show knows that these four characters are as irrecoverably selfish as the worst—which means the most unforgettable—of Jane



"Just put me back into the box gently and close the lid slowly."

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Austen's or Dickens's characters. And now they're put on trial—get it, put on trial—for the very sin that's made them funhouse mirrors of ourselves all these years.

Of course, at the end, they're all found guilty and sentenced to one (not five) year to contemplate their inadequacies. But not before a trial that becomes a national media event—as the last "Seinfeld" itself was a national media event—covered by, in a beautifully self-parodic turn, our uncrowned king of schlockmeisterism, Geraldo Rivera.

But guilty of what, precisely? Well, of Pride (Jerry), Lust (George), Envy (Elaine), and Sloth (Kramer): the four most unavoidable of the seven deadlies, that is, guilty of being human. (I don't know or care if Seinfeld/David planned it this way, but that's how it turned out.)

During the trial almost every major/minor character who has appeared in the series shows up to take a curtain call and to testify that, yes indeed, our four main guys were just as crummy, selfish, and mendacious as we all know ourselves to be most of the time. And in the stunning—there's no other word that serves—last scene, all four are in prison and Jerry is doing his standup act for the cons, and only Kramer is laughing at his jokes.

There's something authentically Kafkaesque about this: "Guilt is never to be doubted," wrote little Franz in "In the Penal Colony." The series about "nothing" written by Jerry and George will not be made; but the series has been made, and is concluding, but concluding in an infinitely-recursive loop. Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer will always be there, in their prison clothes, locked each within the other—since each of the seven deadlies is all of the seven deadlies—acting out for us, in rerun heaven, the gorgeously tacky comedy of being, just, human.

"Sartre. *No Exit*," said my wife Celeste after we watched the last episode. She's right. The last "Seinfeld" disappointed so many of the show's fans—not all—because it raised the ante, and most fans weren't ready to call the raise. I don't want to get too lit-crit on you here, but it's metacomedy: comedy, that is, about what comedy is for, what it's about. And I don't know another sitcom, not even the splendid "Dick Van Dyke Show," "Newhart," "Cheers," or "M*A*S*H" that managed to rise to that level of intelligence.

I am now convinced that W.H. Auden was the greatest critic in the English language of this century. And, writing in the early '40s (in *Commonweal*, it so happens, under the pseudonym "Didymus"), he remarked that while art can never make us want to be good, it can at least preserve us from the illusion that we already are.

Has a wiser thing been said? I think not; certainly nothing more apposite to the last episode of "Seinfeld." It is, and always was, a story about silly people, little people, greedy, barbarous, and cruel. And, as with Aristophanes, Plautus, the Shakespeare of *Much Ado*, Voltaire, Jane Austen, and Thomas Pynchon, it made us less silly by reminding us of how silly we really are. That, I think, is comedy's real gift to us: medicinal anarchy. □

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Digging deeper

Henry Mitchell on Gardening
Henry Mitchell
Houghton Mifflin, $24, 243 pp.

Vivian Segall

Reading about gardening is more fun than actually gardening, at least some of the time. The tired feet are on the ottoman; the back, throbbing from a day of digging and hauling, is ensconced on the couch; and the aching hands, scratched and red, are doing nothing more than turning pages and lifting a cup of coffee. The garden you imagine on the couch is glorious and fully grown. The gardener sees the project in all its finished perfection, conveniently omitting visions of the labor, the failures, and natural disasters that must go into making a garden.

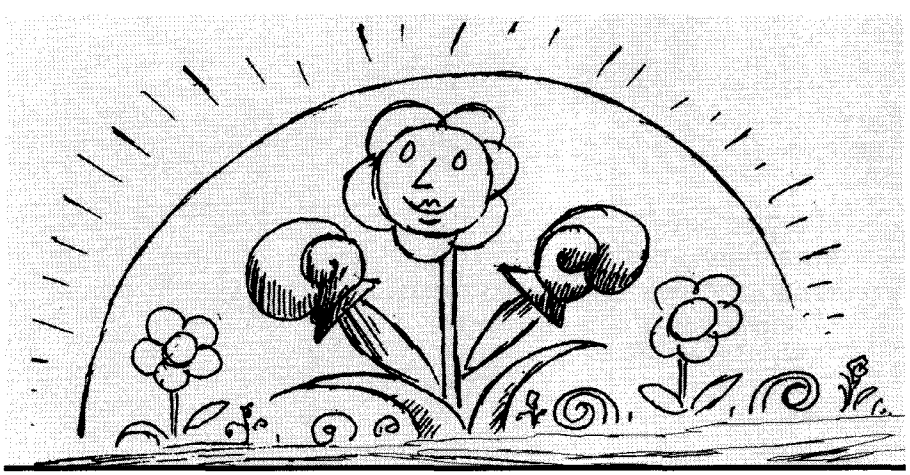
The late Henry Mitchell, a *Washington Post* reporter, wrote his weekly "Earthman" column for the *Post* for twenty years; *Henry Mitchell on Gardening* is the final of three collections of these columns (the others are *The Essential Earthman* [1993] and *One Man's Garden* [1992]). Of all the garden writers I've read, Mitchell is the most comforting. Here is respite from the taskmasters who tell you what must be done this week, or else; from the plant snobs; and most of all, from the idea that perfection is an attainable goal. In "Not Everyone Wants to Go Whole Hog into Gardening," he suggests a landscape design featuring shrubs such as viburnums, flowering quinces, and skimmias, plus a few evergreens, bounded by simple plantings of daffodils, a hundred if you can afford them.

"Such a scheme would not satisfy a deep-dyed gardener," he writes, "but would bring much pleasure with virtually no labor to the new homeowner who is perhaps much preoccupied with small tots and a terrier and a job."

Mitchell is comforting because he believes that the gardener's life is full of woe; that storms and droughts blow and decimate, but "things even out"; that gardening is no job for rigid people; and that you ought to make do with what you have. Now those are refreshing thoughts. A garden is always full of catastrophes: expensive hostas devoured by slugs; an entire row of andromedas that withers and dies; the sourwood tree run over by a cement truck; the infant Peegee hydrangea flattened by the children's gigantic ball. These calamities may not happen in Martha Stewart's garden, but they do in mine. Life goes on.

You can judge a person by his response to failure, Mitchell writes. He praises Thomas Jefferson not for his successes, but for his plans, his passions, his equanimity. "One of Jefferson's most endearing qualities was his serenity in the face of garden disasters, which were as frequent at Monticello as anywhere else," Mitchell writes. Jefferson was always working on his garden in his imagination. And gardening on the couch, to Mitchell, is the mark of the true gardener. "If you fail in small things and cannot perfectly manage your small garden, then expand and take on three times as much. That is gardening orthodoxy and Jefferson believed it with all his heart." If chinaberry trees couldn't survive at Monticello, Jefferson planted them anyway. He had copper beeches shipped in from Washington, Mitchell rejoices, "and if they perished then he tried again and if necessary yet again. He was going to have them and he did. Normal folk would give up at the first disaster."

In view of the inevitable calamities, why do tens of millions of Americans, less eccentric than Jefferson, garden? In a column about raising a favorite daffodil, Cantatrice, which he hadn't managed to grow for decades, he writes, "There is authority for the notion that God once spoke through a jackass, a real one with furry ears....And beyond doubt, sometimes through a weather-defiant flower." Mitchell is dumbstruck by his daffodil, as gardeners sometimes are by a certain plant. "What the right flower can do, with luck, is heal the gardener, making him fit (more or less) to love, by steps however slow. Growing old, still



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in awe, still sitting at her feet."

You plant what you love, even if it's not the right spot or even the right gardening zone. It's okay, because "a garden is what results from years of adjustment in size and successions of enthusiasms." This is a relief. Often when I bring home a longed-for plant—the now-beheaded hydrangea, Stargazer lilies, a Styrax Japonica—I don't know where it will fit, or what it will look good with. I cringe, because in my favorite garden design book, *100 Great Garden Plants*, author William H. Frederick, Jr., warns that when you wedge in a specimen of this or that, you end up not with a garden but a "horticultural zoo." Is each new plant another beast in my zoo? I prefer now to see the garden as a succession of enthusiasms.

Funny and erudite, Mitchell turns a phrase effortlessly. Tree peonies, which he loves, have blossoms the size of soup plates. From once-tiny buds, "these opulent gorgeous flowers spring forth like clowns from a Volkswagen." He dismisses the envied British climate as bleak, saying it is "astonishing they even attempt a garden there, so sunless are their skies." He loves Judd's viburnum, Spanish squills, sedum Autumn Joy, and dazzling little flowers that bloom their heads off, like the roses Polyantha Grandiflora and Mrs. Flight. He forgets to clean the lily pool, loves butterflies and cicadas, and can tell you how to grow dahlias or tomatoes or trumpet vines. He is not a snob; nearly any plant, superbly grown, gives him pleasure. Modern technology, he says, hasn't done much for the home gardener, who still must hand-weed the irises and stake the lilies (he once had 2,500 lilies).

The gardener does these things with pleasure nonetheless. "People like gardening precisely because it differs from the 'efficiency' of modern life. People like to dig, and they like to dig with the same spade or fork that their predecessors used a thousand years before them." And when they're finished, they like to sit on a couch and read Henry Mitchell. □

Vivian Segall *writes, and imagines gardens, in Noank, Connecticut.*

Reflections of an Apollo Astronaut

Nothing ever moves upon the moon
except shadows,
which circle the mountains
and the maculate, still seas.
At home there is no rest:
blue seas are rich,
yellow harvests brim,
and sounds of engines fill the mountains and the fields.

In Pennsylvania, in winter's quiet,
snow ghosts the hills and semis sleep.
A car drives on
in the spirit country,
with the radio off
and the winged snow like a messenger.

Unheard, the lunar music radiates in sunlight
on the cliffs and pours like wind
across the tranquil sea…

Home is a song, my friend,
heard in the runner's step,
heard through the chaos of springs and stars.

Locusts drown the orchard and the sky.
Hypnotic voices charm the traveler
siphoning his dreams—
He wakes desireless,
seeking just the placid drone of motion.

Onyx and coral,
Orion lusters in the moon's heavens,
the Pleiades there are milky and virginal,
beckoning to other seas and other gardens.
(We ran like children, our souls laughed to see them.)
A musical dust burns at the air's edge,
a musical light touches the towers of cities,
and the amazed deaf wonder their souls should hear.

Someone buys coffee, steals crackers: a meal for kings and queens.
In prospect from the Apollo Diner
miles stretch away like open hands;
vapor lamps, flood lights intensify,
braceleting dusk.

Ocean's sleepy chant enwraps the coast;
trucks speed east and west, white and red lights;
wind whistles in the dark pine.
We say goodnights while planes fly on,
rasping the hard resilient sky,
gliding in ample dawn,
landing with a final click, continuous.

Lee Oser

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BLEAK, THRILLING & FUNNY

Damascus Gate
Robert Stone
Houghton Mifflin, $26, 500 pp.

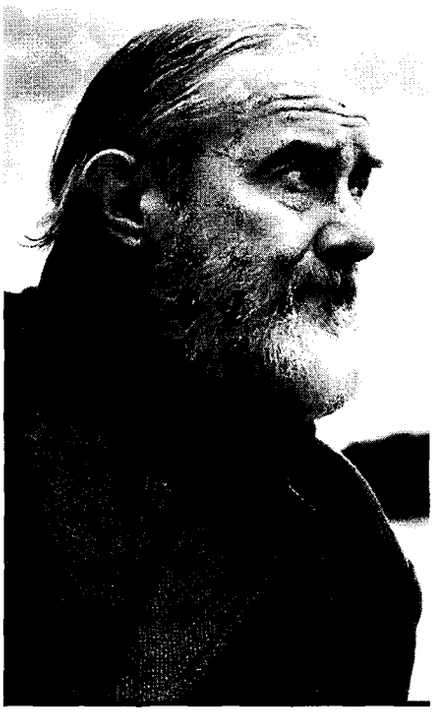
John Garvey

Damascus Gate has a number of elements which will be familiar to Robert Stone's readers: drugs, alcohol, the threat of violence, death, and characters searching desperately for a meaning that eludes them. But this novel is unique in the way that it approaches, head-on, the theme that moves in the background of other Stone novels: a God who has withdrawn from the universe. In much of Stone's work there is a sense either that there is no God, and we need him, or there is a God, and he is guilty of having abandoned us. This is a kind of visceral, felt gnosticism. Here Stone has found the perfect vehicle for his vision: the mystical Jewish tradition of Lurianic Kabbalah. It will help to have read Gershom Scholem before reading this book.

But this is not to say that the book is a heavy read, or that it is freighted with theology, or even that you should read Scholem. As is always the case with Stone's work, *Damascus Gate* works on its own as a thrilling novel, perhaps his best. It takes place in Jerusalem, and the city is itself a central character. Christopher Lucas, a journalist fascinated with religion, agrees to work on a book with Dr. Pinchas Obermann, a psychiatrist who is fascinated by the "Jerusalem Syndrome." Obermann offers a typical example: "A young man of scant prospects receives a supernatural communication. He must go to Jerusalem at the Almighty's command. Once here, his mission is disclosed. Often he is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ."

Lucas is the son of a Jewish father and his Catholic mistress. Another character, a jazz singer named Sonia Barnes, is the daughter of an African-American father and a Jewish mother. They find themselves drawn to each other, despite Lucas's not-so-unshakable skepticism and Sonia's involvement with Sufism and persistent desire to believe. Together they are drawn into the orbit of a strange pair: an old man from Louisiana, a Jew named Adam De Kuff, who has converted to and abandoned Catholicism to return to Judaism; and Raziel Melker, a former drug addict and jazz musician who studies the Kabbalah and convinces De Kuff that he is to be the agent of a great revelation, even the Messiah himself. We are introduced to both in Dr. Obermann's office. Once Stone has placed everyone on stage (it takes a while), he involves them in a plot that includes betrayal, gun-running, riots, and a scheme to destroy sacred sites. He brings it off beautifully.

One of Stone's many gifts is the sudden way his humor can intrude into bleakness, without making the bleakness any lighter or the humor any less funny. Early on, for example, Lucas finds himself in the company of a Palestinian who insists that Woody Allen has come to Jerusalem to lend support to the Palestinian cause. And late in the novel another wild rumor is put to practical use. At the same time, there are moments when Stone brings us through almost hallucinogenically intense passages, something which makes me think of Melville's powerful chapter on the whiteness of the whale in *Moby Dick*. He has done this in several of his novels (remember the scene on the island in *Outerbridge Reach?*) and he does it here. I can't think of anyone else who does this sort of thing so well.



The Kabbalah is a central part of *Damascus Gate*, and Stone is good at hinting at what it means just enough to intrigue us. The Kabbalah, like the apophatic theology of Eastern Orthodoxy and the mystical theology of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and John of the Cross, insists that the concealed Godhead (called "'*Ein-Sof*") "dwells unknowable in the depths of its own being, without form or shape. It is beyond all cognitive statements, and can be named only through negation—indeed, the negation of all negations. No images can depict it, nor can it be named by any name" (Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*). God's creation and self-revealing proceed as emanations from this unknowable one (and even "one" could mislead).

Isaac Luria, the sixteenth-century Kabbalist, took an even more radical position: the *'Ein-Sof* contracted itself, withdrew before any emanation, and is present in creation only as the broken shards left by the act of that withdrawing. This is a drastic oversimplification of a complex and beautiful set of teachings, but it is easy to see why it would appeal to Stone. After Lucas encounters this teaching, he turns to Pascal's *Pensées* "to look up something he half-remembered.

"'The universe is such that it bears witness everywhere to a lost God,' Pascal had written, 'in man and outside him and to a fallen nature.'"

In another place, Lucas visits the Holocaust memorial, *Yad Vashem*; leaving it he prays, untypically, and thinks,

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"It might be...that the world divided there, into the race of those somehow responsible and those somehow not. It was a division personally difficult for him. But around it spun a fallen universe of shame. Everyone would always look into its darkness as deeply as they could or dared. Everyone wanted an answer, a guide for the perplexed. Everyone wanted death and suffering to mean something."

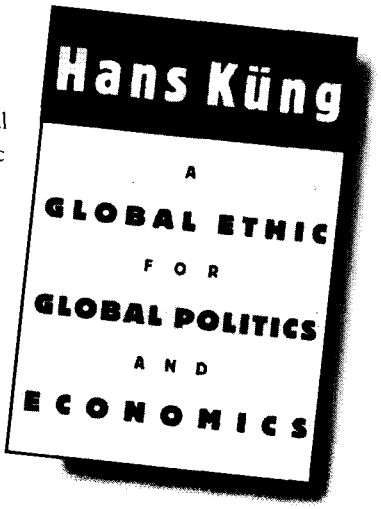
This (like all Stone's works) is informed by the Melville-like desire to "strike through the mask," and shows how strangely close nihilism and belief can be. What makes Stone's work extraordinary is that he is able to move us terrifyingly close to edges we would rather not look over, as many of the greatest novelists do—and at the same time he offers as exciting and exhilarating a read as any of the best thriller writers.

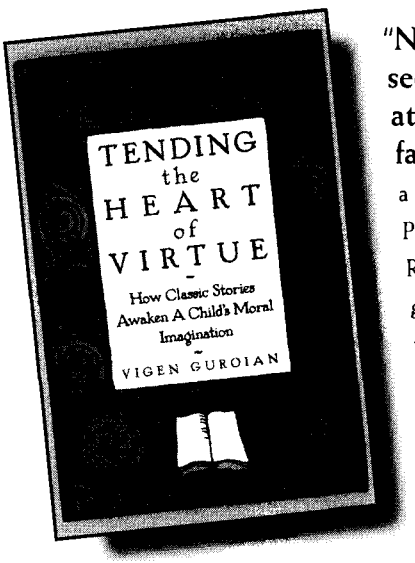
I can't think of much that William Trevor and Stone have in common as stylists, but I remember when I started reading Trevor's *Fools of Fortune*, which begins with a description of an idyllic Irish Protestant family, my first thought was, "What horrible fate does he have in store for these poor people?" You feel that way with all of Stone's characters too. But—even though people here wind up comatose, murdered, and unhappy—there is something almost hopeful in *Damascus Gate*; and certainly (as always in Stone) moments where beauty and hope, madness and despair, are brought very close to us. "It's a terrible fate to stand between the worlds," Sonia tells Lucas at one point. "It's like madness." And you are left even at the end wondering what genuine truths the failed messianic believers in this novel might be pointing toward, or if there is any final meaning at all to point to. There is a final truth, I fervently believe and hope, but Stone shows how close and at the same time how far apart are the worlds of the nihilist and the genuine believer. And if you feel uncomfortable with the ideas that crop up here, read the book as a great thriller. It works wonderfully at both levels. □

John Garvey *is a columnist for* Commonweal.

Hans Küng, one of the world's preeminent theologians, offers a thought-provoking look at the coming global society. Küng outlines a comprehensive ethic that would encompass the ecological, legal, technological, and social patterns that are reshaping the globe.

A GLOBAL ETHIC FOR GLOBAL POLITICS AND ECONOMICS
Hans Küng





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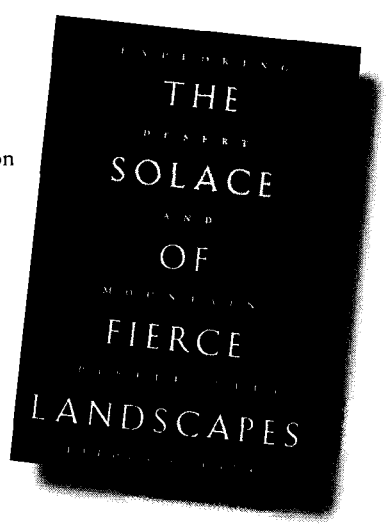

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ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection
Louis Dupré
William B. Eerdmans, $20, 147 pp.

Edward T. Oakes

Over fifty years ago Monsignor John Tracy Ellis sounded his tocsin, warning the world of Catholic higher education that it had been mired too long in the mastodon-pits of mediocrity. Since that famous trumpet blast (and perhaps largely because of it) Catholic intellectuals have grown in stature, and several Catholic universities have departments that are among the best in the nation.

But all too often, when Catholic scholars become leaders within their fields, they remain just that: leaders *within* their fields. Occasionally a Catholic intellectual (even one who works inside the academy as a professor) will have influence among the wider educated public: for example, Avery Dulles, Walter Ong, and, increasingly, Mary Ann Glendon; but their number still strikes me as remarkably small.

Whether this lamentable dearth is cause for discouragement or is simply a sign of talent's rarity can be disputed, but with this volume under review at least Catholics have the occasion to celebrate in their midst one of the most significant philosophers of religion of the twentieth century, Louis Dupré of Yale. Moreover, as this slim but remarkable book of essays makes abundantly clear, its author bids fair to have an influence that will last into the next century, at the least: there is something about his philosophy that seems not just nourishing for a day or hour but perennially satisfying.

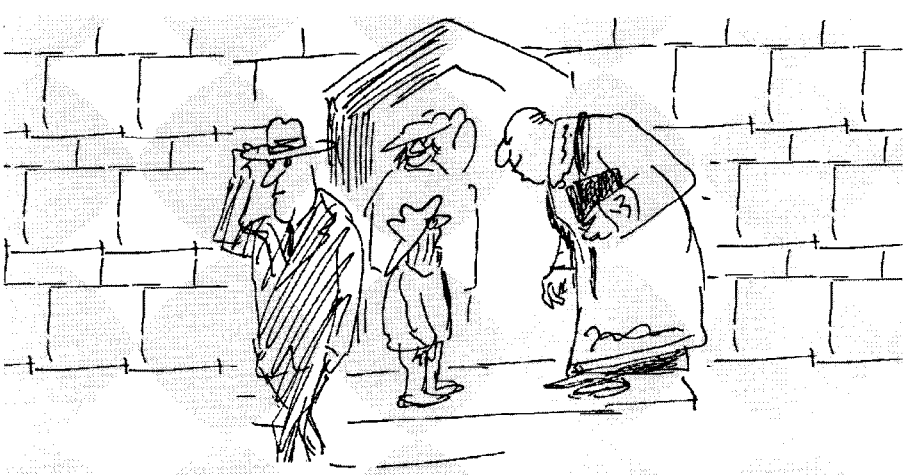
In contrast, philosophy of religion as currently pursued by most other practitioners tends to content itself with endlessly chewing on the same meatless bones. Can God foresee the future and still leave free agents free to make their own choices? Can God be omnipotent and all-good and still permit evil to coexist with the good? How can God intervene in a world that seems to operate just fine according to the laws of natural causality?

As Dupré makes clear in a good number of these essays, philosophy of religion never seems to make progress in resolving these and other issues because of its habit of accepting the legitimacy of the questions as formulated. Partly this is attributed to the continued isolation of Anglo-American analytic philosophy from Continental efforts; and partly to the habits of the academy, which tends to farm out different topics to different specialties, so that philosophers of religion talk only to philosophers of religion, philosophers of science to their colleagues in the philosophy of science, etc.

Fortunately, none of this professional astigmatism afflicts Dupré: blessed with a remarkable command of languages (he was born in Belgium and thus grew up equally fluent in Dutch and French; studied German when in doctoral studies; learned English, his fourth modern language, with a native's fluency when he came to this country in the 1950s; and later learned Danish to write his famous book *Kierkegaard as Theologian*), he has become one of the great mediators of European intellectual history in this country (his recent *Passage to Modernity* was widely praised). Moreover, he has a remarkable command of the sources and can find an apposite quote of one or two sentences from, say, a multivolume edition of Hegel that exactly fits his point. And unlike so many other scholars, Dupré does not pour out all of his reading onto the page and end up, as they say, "all over the place."

All of these habits are, of course, useful in any scholar; but they could never alone account for the creativity of a writer's work—and for a direct insight into the nature of Dupré's own wondrous originality there can be no better volume than this work of collected essays, which, unlike some instances of the genre, is in fact a cohesive body of work that flows easily from one chapter to the next.

Perhaps best of all is his chapter on theodicy, the attempt (in John Milton's words) "to justify God's ways to man" in the face of the self-evident evils of the world. First, Dupré openly admits that theodicy is a failed experiment. Voltaire liked to make fun of Leibniz's insistence that this is the best of all possible worlds; but nowadays, in a century filled with genocide and almost interminable ideological warfare, even that kind of village-atheist mockery, however deserved,



"Could you tell me again how rich I am?"

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sounds unpleasant and inappropriate, like an adolescent giggling at a funeral. But more crucially, Dupré can see just why the experiment failed, and here one discovers an analysis that all philosophers of religion should take to heart. Building on the eminently valid Thomistic point that it makes no sense to talk of God (who is pure actuality) having a prior set of possibilities from which to choose a world, Dupré shows that the idea of a "best possible world" imposes on the Creator a subjective, human standard: "Both theodicy's adversaries and advocates," he says, "hold a concept of freedom that from the start sets the discussion on the wrong track."

Whenever freedom is set forth as the power to choose among various options, philosophy of religion will go astray. Only when freedom is understood as the expression of creativity, both divine and human, will rational reflection on religion get off the dime: "To be effective in theodicy the idea of redemption must be integrated with that of creation as one continuous, active relation of God to his creatures."

But how can that be done in our post-Newtonian, post-Enlightenment times when God seems so distant and, if existent at all, only faintly so as Comforting Idea? As Dupré says, for the answer to that question we must meet religious people and see how they in fact confront the world's evil; only then can we ever grasp the resources religion has for coping with suffering and malice. Or as he says in his manifesto: we must expand philosophical theology "beyond the rationalist limits within which a purely causal, basically deist philosophy has constrained it." And what would that look like? Well, for the answer to that question, the reader need look no further than right here in *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection*, one of the most satisfying works in philosophical theology that I can remember reading for some time. □

Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *is associate professor of religious studies at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, and author of* Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar *(Continuum, 1994).*

RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

A generation ago a group of theologians from the Roman universities and the regional seminaries of Italy met to discuss urgent tasks facing theology in the post-Vatican II period. There was consensus that a history of theology was badly needed. That effort, which was designed to be one of collaboration, has now come to fruition. The intention of this collective effort was to focus on the conditions, incentives, and agents of theological work in terms of the places where theology was done and the results achieved. More positively, the authors set out a long series of questions that were to be kept in mind as they proceeded. Those questions ranged from methodological ones to issues of the relationship of theology to liturgy, philosophy, church teachings, and the culture of the day, as well as questions about the relationship of theology to spirituality. Eventually, this will be a four-volume work.

History of Theology
The Patristic Period
edited by Angelo di Berardino and Basil Studer
Glazier/Liturgical Press, $99.95, 632 pp.

Ably turned into English by veteran translator Matthew J. O'Connell, this is not a handbook for beginners. The writers presume a certain level of theological and historical knowledge (even though they do provide a handy chronological table to help situate the flow of their story), a mastery of some technical vocabulary, and at least a nodding acquaintance with the *dramatis personae*. They also expect the reader to be familiar with the standard surveys of patristics.

The volume traces the development from the apostolic fathers down to the sixth century when the great councils had finished the basic work of the church on issues of Trinitarian and Christological definition. A fundamental motif emphasizes the role of scriptural interpretation, since "the most famous theologians of the patristic age were also exceptional interpreters of the sacred Scriptures, beginning with Irenaeus and Justin, and especially with Origen." In-

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deed, I would say that one of the most conspicuous merits of this volume is its attention to the history and development of scriptural exegesis.

This history is divided into three parts: (1) a consideration of theology in the first three centuries; (2) theology in the imperial church, which is to say from roughly A.D. 300 to 450; and (3) later patristic theology. There are also discrete chapters as well as subchapters which attend to special issues, methodologies, and the slow evolution of technical vocabulary.

In this brief review it is impossible even to outline the chapters of this rich volume, so one example must suffice. In part 2, Basil Studer discusses the Bible in the church while treating in six subchapters the following topics: the authority of the Bible; the meaning of sacred Scripture; the faith professed in the baptismal liturgy; the doctrinal role of early synods; the evolution of the notion of "Fathers of the Church"; the beginnings of the doctrinal authority of the Roman See. Under those headings, in turn, further topics are discussed, such as the development of the canon of Scripture, the evolution of creeds, which books had pride of place in theology, the authority of councils, and so on.

Needless to say, this organizational pattern brings with it difficulties. There is some repetition and some tangled pages when dealing with controversies (especially those which developed after Chalcedon). More frustrating to me was the publisher's decision (always a bad one in scholarly works, in my estimation) to use endnotes rather than footnotes. The running heads of the endnotes do not always agree with the running heads of the text. I did appreciate the fact that at the end of long sections there were some summary conclusions that tied together the main threads.

The rather high cost of this volume will keep it out of the hands of most students and not a few teachers, but it certainly deserves a place in libraries. Perhaps a softcover volume will be available in the future.

There is an extraordinary amount of interesting information and many fine pages on the development of theology in this history. I shall place it next to such standards as Pelikan, Kelly, Quasten, *et al.*, on my library shelf. The volume reflects immense learning (as one would expect from authors like Studer and the Origen expert, Henri Crouzel) and even though the bibliographies are heavy on Italian authors and somewhat slight on Anglo-American ones, the translator does indicate English translations when available. The index, alas, is inexcusably limited to a thin assemblage of "topics." Future volumes should have separate indices for authors and subjects.

Dupuis is eminently qualified to write this book. A Belgian Jesuit, he taught in India from 1948 until he joined the theological faculty of Gregorian University in Rome in 1984. This comprehensive volume represents the capstone to the author's numerous studies on the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions. Dupuis writes as a theologian (part of the burden of this work is to show what the term *comparative* theologian might mean) and not as a historian of religions. In that sense, he claims the right to "interpret data in the perspective of a personal commitment to a religious faith and claims the right to pronounce, within that perspective, value judgments."

Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism
by Jacques Dupuis, S.J.
Orbis, $50, 433 pp.

Dupuis does not mean to describe his task in any imperial fashion. On the contrary, his way of doing theology is irenic and genuinely alert to others. Part 1 looks at the way Christianity has approached other religions. Dupuis writes unflinchingly of the harshly restrictive attitude of the church about the salvation of non-Christians—anyone who thinks that the magisterium never changes its mind ought to read Dupuis's pages on the evolution of the dictum "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*." He reminds us how Vatican II and subsequent statements from the magisterium have altered our understanding of this doctrine. His discussion of the debate on the eve of Vatican II—whether arguing for a "fulfillment" theory (religions finding their finality in Christ) or focusing on the mystery of Christ (most famously, Rahner's "anonymous Christian")—is very helpful. Lingering influences of these discussions are detected in some of the recent utterances from Rome.

Part 2 provides a magisterial survey of those theologians who have been at the heart of the discussion of the unique claims of Christianity. Dupuis summarizes fairly and offers a critique of all the usual suspects: John Hick, Paul Knitter, Gavin D'Costa, *et al.* Dupuis himself stands squarely in the middle of these debates. He refuses to align himself with those who would relativize the claims of the gospel or those who would make triumphalistic claims. His own approach is to insist on the role of the Holy Spirit. As he exhaustively documents, the magisterial documents of the church acknowledge that the Holy Spirit operates both in the lives of people who are not Christian and in other religious traditions. In this endeavor he argues for a Trinitarian Christology that pushes to the not-yet-arrived "reign of God." In fact, Dupuis uses the neologism of "regnocentric" to get beyond both ecclesiocentric and Christocentric categories that attempt to correlate Christian claims with those of the other religions. He sees this approach very much in line with Pope John Paul II's efforts at the Day of Universal Prayer in Assisi and in *Redemptoris missio*, where the pope explicitly affirms that every attempt at working for "gospel values" is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is from that orientation that Dupuis argues, finally, that there is no inherent contradiction between authentic interreligious dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel. That conclusion, of course, is most important for grasping the significance of missionary work.

These brief remarks do not do justice to the usefulness of this book. It should become a standard study on this most pressing question in theology. This work is further enhanced by a very thorough bibliography, and an index of scriptural sources with a separate name index. Dupuis provides a brilliant *tour de horizon* as well as some original theological thinking. His topic will only be

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more pressing as the new millennium approaches.

Congar's massive three-volume study of the Holy Spirit, composed in part as a response to the rise of the charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic church after the Second Vatican Council, was first published in French in 1979-1980; an English translation appeared in 1983. Crossroad/Herder has now republished all three volumes in one, at a very modest price, as part of its series Milestones in Catholic Theology. The Milestones series is to be applauded for bringing some excellent works back into print. My late-lamented colleague, Catherine LaCugna, wrote an introduction for its reissuing of Karl Rahner's *The Trinity* (a work thoroughly discussed by Congar in his book); and I have just received a copy of Karl Adam's classic *The Spirit of Catholicism* with a valuable introductory historical essay by another colleague, Robert A. Krieg, C.S.C.

The reprinting of Congar's work is especially timely. John Paul has asked that 1998 be a year in which special focus is

I Believe in the Holy Spirit
by Yves Congar
Crossroad/Herder, $29.95, 3 volumes, 678 pp.

made on the Holy Spirit as part of the preparations for the great year of Jubilee as we enter the new millennium. I cannot think of a finer way to prepare for this year of reflection and prayer than by a close consideration of Congar's work. It is a comprehensive study of Catholic teaching on the Holy Spirit as well as a serious dialogue with the Christian East, whose pneumatology is so central to their vision of the Christian life. Congar's first volume surveys the witness of the Scriptures and the Christian tradition about the Holy Spirit. Volume 2 examines the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. The final book discusses the developments of this theological tradition in both West and East, and makes some serious ecumenical suggestions in an effort to heal misunderstandings between the two sister churches.

Readers who know Congar's work will recognize his total mastery of both the fundamental sources of theology and his broad grasp of the pertinent scholarship. As preparation for some tasks given me in this year of the Holy Spirit, I have been going over this entire work. It is like receiving a theological education again. What most impresses me is the spirit that Congar (named a cardinal shortly before his death) brings to his theological work. Congar realizes the enormity of the task he has set himself. Before plunging into Augustine's subtle and prolix treatise, *De Trinitate*, he writes: "I have been only able to carry out this work in an environment of prayer and the celebration of the mysteries of faith—in other words, in a theological and doxological climate, and in the communion of saints." Obviously, a good deal of published research has appeared since Congar wrote these volumes. Still, they stand up well.

Crossroad/Herder is to be congratulated on the series. This particular volume of the late Dominican scholar is especially welcome both for its intrinsic

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merit and as a tribute to one of the greatest theologians of our century. One can only hope that more Congar will be forthcoming in reprint; perhaps his classic *Tradition and Traditions*?

Thomas Finn's survey concerns how people in antiquity "turned" to a religion or religious practice and how that conversion was ritualized. He begins with an analysis of how Jews and early Christians in pagan antiquity understood the term "conversion" and its cognates. He goes on to study the relevant sources and describe the conversion processes in Greco-Roman paganism and in Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. His final chapters are devoted to the development of ideas about conversion and the ritual process of conversion in Christianity from its New Testament origins down to the elaborate initiation ceremonies of the fourth century. Drawing on theoretical models from both the history of religion and sociology, Finn attempts some general definitions of conversion, and reflects on that phenomenon both as a personal quest for meaning and a social phenomenon.

From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity
by Thomas M. Finn
Paulist, $19.95, 286 pp.

Although this work draws upon a good deal of technical research (some supplied by the author himself in scholarly outlets) this book is clearly written and accessible to a nonscholarly audience. With the recent development of RCIA programs in most parishes, it would make a fine study text for those who work in that ministry. Finn has interwoven liturgical history with theology so seamlessly that it also could serve as a textbook for courses in continuing education or college-level theology.

Readers of this column know I have a weakness for serious anthologies of prayers. Theology stated in an affective and doxological fashion has a great attraction for me, and I am happy to call attention to this collection, which was published just a few years ago in Great Britain and is now available to an American readership.

The Doubleday Prayer Collection
edited by Mary Batchelor
Doubleday, $22, 509 pp.

Every anthologist must decide on the rubric under which a collection is to be organized. This work opts for the "occasional" approach. Divided under twenty-six categories with well over a thousand prayers, Batchelor uses headings like forgiveness, home and family, children's prayers, grace before meals, journeys, illness, needs, etc. A range of prayers from classical sources as well as brief contemporary prayers is offered. These prayers also range from the stately and the liturgical to the whimsical. A nice feature of this collection is that interspersed in the text are simple sentences for meditation, repetition, or reflection. Such short phrases, as Saint Augustine says in his famous letter to Proba, are like "flaming javelins, sent to God."

This collection stands in the tradition of the Harper anthology of prayers, the Oxford University anthology edited by George Appleton, and Tony Castle's collection published a little over a decade ago. However, when Batchelor's work is compared to those collections one can note a few minor deficiencies. Although the large-size layout and printing are very handsomely done, I think they are a mistake. One suspects that the larger format will relegate it too easily to the bookshelf or coffee table. Second, the notes on the contributors seem rather hastily researched, resulting in some awkward formulations. John of the Cross, for instance, is identified as founding the "Barefoot Orders." Likewise, Tony Castle did not compose the common blessing for meals ("Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts...") but merely collected this old Catholic prayer for his own anthology.

I note these quibbles only because this volume does not meet the standard of the other collections I regularly consult. However, let me hasten to add that the author does give us a nice index of authors and also indices of all the prayers taken from the Old and New Testament. Since the intention is to focus the prayer collections on the exigencies of both personal and social life, ministers, teachers, and others will be pleased to see that Batchelor has provided prayers for job loss, pets, miscarriages, new homes, hospice visits, and so on. I would not judge this collection to be *the* anthology, but it certainly is a welcome addition to the growing literature on prayer. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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HOOP DREAMS

Timothy P. Schilling

A red metal hoop presents a pretty clear target to a boy dribbling a ball on a driveway. The metal ring repeatedly answers his questions. No matter what goes into the attempt, a straight answer comes back, yes or no. Mostly this is a matter-of-fact yes or no, but there are variations: yes, *definitely, O graced one*; no, *are you crazy?; hmmm, possibly, I...I...I... don't think so* (or sometimes, *I do think so, you lucky boy*).

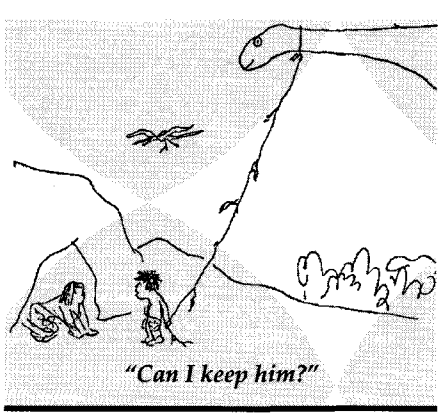
I used to be able to sum up my whole imaginative life in those solitary practice sessions. It wasn't that I ever saw myself devoting my entire life to basketball. Rather, playing the game, and perhaps most especially practicing by myself, gave physical expression to the whole business of becoming in my life.

Sure, I wanted to become a great ballplayer. In Indiana you are surrounded by stories of basketball heroism. I'd read about how John Wooden had won a high school game by sinking the final shot sitting down, after being knocked to the floor on a drive to the basket. I knew the story of the giant-killer high school team from Milan, Indiana long before the movie *Hoosiers* was made. I took pleasure in knowing that Oscar Robertson, who grew up in Indianapolis, used to wash his basketball before going out to play. I did that, too. Most of all, I identified with Rick Mount, the countryish shooting legend who led his high school team to the state title, and Purdue University all the way to the NCAA finals before losing to Lew Alcindor and the UCLA Bruins. When Rick Mount was in eighth grade people used to come by the hundreds to watch him play in a summer league. Wasn't that something?

So yes, I wanted to be a great ballplayer. But I wanted to be other things, too: a leader in politics, perhaps; the husband of a gorgeous woman; someone who was financially secure. For a Midwestern boy, I suppose my dreams could not have been more conventional, but they were many, and most importantly, they were still in the process of being formulated. It was all open and out there. The sky was full of opportunity, and in level-earth, amber-waves Indiana, you've got a lot of sky to work with.

Midday in July on an outdoor court in the Hoosier state is not a time for dreaming. It's too bright and hot and humid. Sweat runs in your eyes. Playing then is mostly about the game itself. But later, in the early evening, the light and heat diminish. The sky is inviting again and the mind goes over to speculations. The game loses its literalness. Shots become essays, conjectures. Hook shots become elegant proposals. In the assortment of physical acts, personal aspirations take on worldly shape for the first time.

These are representative acts, demonstrations of larger commitments: collecting one's breath at the free-throw line; sighting the target; visualizing the ball dropping through the hoop; following through. You remind yourself that the hoop is twice the size of the ball. It's immense. And that lovely green-eyed girl from your school—she's watching you out there somewhere. She's so beautiful. Tomorrow you will ride your bike past her house.



"Can I keep him?"

Many of the dreams that I first dreamed while shooting baskets in Battle Ground, Indiana, I now know I will never realize. For one thing, I never became a great ballplayer. And politics probably isn't in the cards for me either. I still like to shoot baskets, and I still daydream while doing so. But it's different now. I miss the shapeliness and directedness of the basketball dreaming of my youth. All things converged on the court in those days, with reassuring swishes, thumps, and clangs serving as the aural signals of an orderly universe. All of my dreams were able to meet in this one place. I wasn't religious in those days (maybe a little), but I do see that period as a time of grace, a time of instruction in possibilities.

Lyrical as some of those moments were, I don't long to relive the trials that accompanied my early adolescent dreaming. We seem to live our lives in stages (childhood, high school, college, etc.), and each stage has its own imaginative field and fruits thereof. Art, religion, and ambiguity were among the richest findings of my young adulthood away from the basketball court. Still, in my muscles and bones I can recall a rare unity that once was there when I had a basketball in my hands. Body, spirit, and purpose were all held together in fine clarity.

That sense of completeness—or at least the possibility of completeness—has been replaced by an odd joy of dispersal, in which I now take pleasure and discomfort in not having all options before me, and often not knowing at all what the best option is. I guess this is what we call getting older and wiser. Sometimes it's hard, though, not to give in to the sentimentality of longing for a time when a jump shot and a swish meant everything. □

Timothy P. Schilling *lives in Seattle, Washington.*

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